

Women in Political and civic Life

Obstacles and Challenges
to Overcome them

in

Morocco, Tunisia, Occupied
Palestine Territories, Yemen

Regional Report

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Regional Report

Edited by
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for Training and Research
CAWTAR**
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Foreword and acknowledgements

The Arab region has witnessed since 2011 a state of political and social dynamism in the wake of the so-called Arab revolutions which has had an impact on most Arab countries, either directly or indirectly. From Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen to Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria and other countries, the impact of this social dynamism and its consequences have varied considerably, resulting in several transformations whether in the political systems or the constitutions and laws in force in different countries.

In as much as this dynamism has created expectations of change for the better among Arab peoples, it has also given rise to many challenges, obstacles and negative effects. Arab women have not only been at the forefront of this social movement since its inception, but faced such challenges, especially with the emergence of extremist movements in various countries.

There has been a growing number of cases of violence against women, higher rates of poverty and marginalization and more obstacles to women's presence and participation in the public sphere and, in particular, in political life. Yet, in this phase, Arab women have proven their capacity to develop new strategies to adapt to this changing situation and shown their definite desire to participate on an equal footing with men and to be effective leaders in society, both locally and nationally, for the sake of establishing more democracy, equality and social justice.

But in spite of the success of some women at becoming leaders and effecting change in their communities, both locally and nationally, their numbers remain rather limited and modest in comparison to the efforts exerted by women in this regard and the factors supporting equal participation to that of men.

This has given rise to the idea of conducting this qualitative study which the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), in partnership with Oxfam solicited to cover four Arab countries—namely, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen

and The Occupied Palestinian Territory- with the objective of understanding the obstacles and opportunities for women's participation in political and civic life. This study is part of "AMAL", a regional program implemented by Oxfam together with several other stakeholders in the domain in Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and occupied Palestinian territory.

The choice of these four countries was not arbitrary, but met key conditions which would help us understand what is taking place in the Arab World today. Tunisia, for one, was the first country to experience the popular movement of 2011 and to affect the democratic transition peacefully while enjoying a legal system which supported women and was maintained in the constitution of 2014. As for Morocco, it was among the countries that adopted significant legal measures and amendments in favor of women and the democratization of society since 2011. The choice of the occupied Palestinian territory was justified by the attempt to understand the impact of the occupation on the situation of women under the worsening conditions of the siege and media blackout.

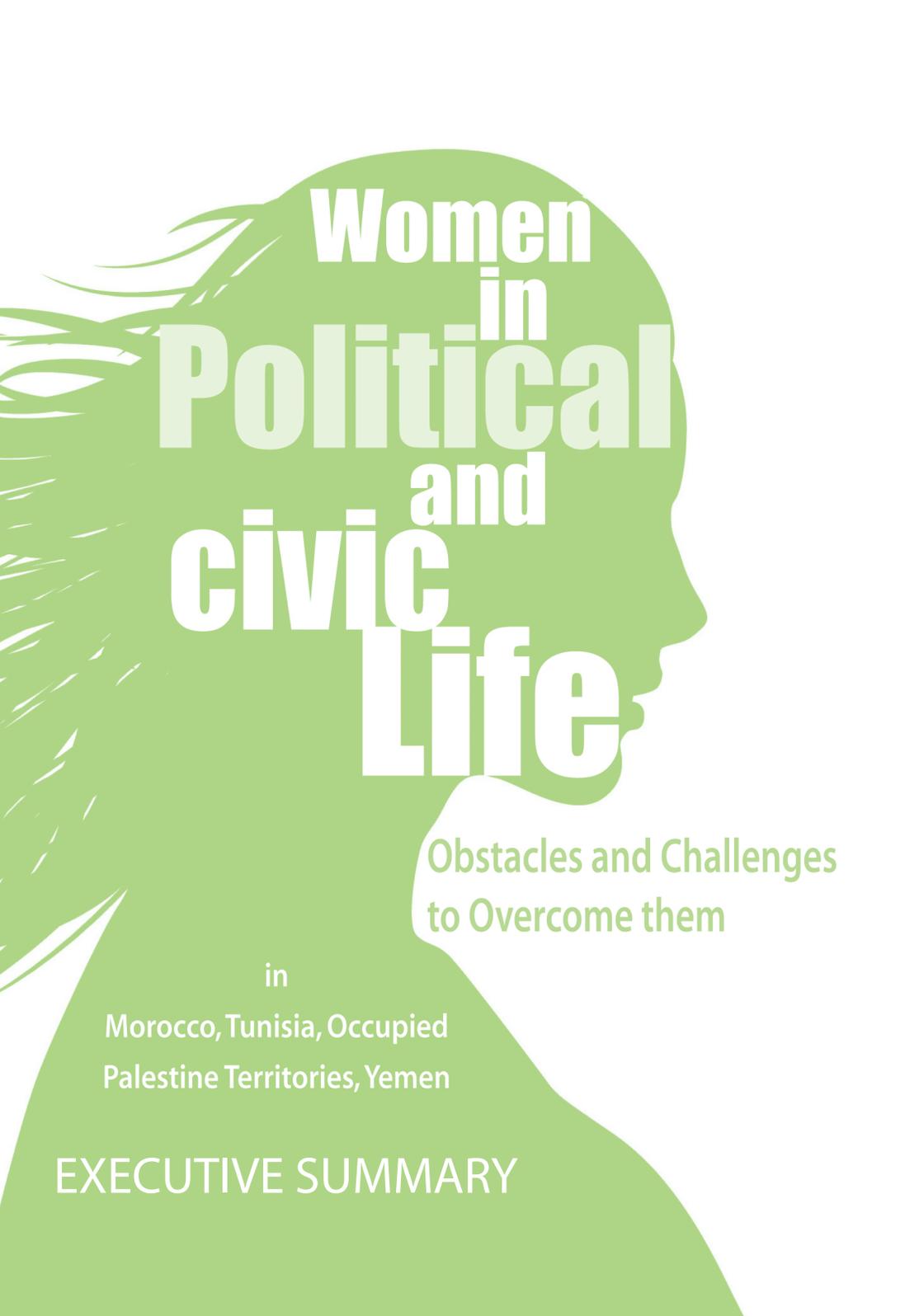
In the case of Yemen, the choice was essentially due to what the country has experienced in terms of the upheaval of Yemeni society, the breakout of internal conflicts and the involvement of foreign powers, with all that brings in terms of devastation, destruction of infrastructure and obliteration of the foundations of the state, thus leading the society to a vicious circle of wars and conflicts further exacerbated by human disasters and conditions of poverty and starvation.

The study reveals bright and dark sides of the current situation of some Arab countries today, about four years after the Arab revolutions. It present also new forms and models of women transformative leadership, that we can qualify «non traditional». The study is trying to contribute in shaping the concept of women transformative leadership, in a changing political, social and cultural context.

In closing, I should thank Oxfam for supporting this project and for its efforts to promote the conditions of Arab women. I should also thank the team of experts and the members of the academic commission for cooperating with us to complete this qualitative study.

CAWTAR is confident that this study will open the door for numerous national and regional studies to better understand the obstacles that women face and the opportunities they have today to enter the political arena and to play transformative leadership roles. The Center also hopes there will be documents based on the results of this study to be addressed to policy makers in order to amend existing legislation or pass new laws that clearly support the struggle of Arab women.

Dr. Soukeina Bouraoui
Executive Director
CAWTAR



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

This report presents the outcome of a study launched by the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and Oxfam on the obstacles and opportunities for women to participate in civic and political life in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, specifically in Morocco, Tunisia, the occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen.

What the study promises to add is not its uniqueness in treating a new topic, but its new perspective on a central issue relating to participation, with the awareness that the situation of men and women in political and civic life is the result of different forms of social upbringing which require a deeper reading of reality as it stands and how it changes.

In this context, and amid all available and ongoing research on women's participation in civic and political life as one of the factors of development, knowledge about poor and marginalized women in relation to politics is scarce to non-existent; all the more so in the case of some women in this category who have managed to overcome obstacles and become involved in public and political affairs starting from attempts to change particular conditions in their local context.

Even though many studies have tried to keep up with the changing knowledge stakes relative to the changing social and political contexts, they remained focused on women's representation in public life and in leadership positions as well as on their decision-making capacities in the Arab World. This approach stems from a view of leadership that is tied to women being able to develop the capacity to set objectives for a project around which they would manage to rally a significant number of people; however, this view fails to capture another kind of leadership which emerges in a hostile social context that is full of factors hindering women's participation in political and civic life and lacking the favorable structural elements for a political upbringing.

Accordingly, this report aims, among other objectives, to develop the views on leadership and empowerment so as to learn about particular women who started from “the impossible” to reach the possible and changed their lives through civic and political participation and, thus, affect change in their local community and in the surrounding social environment.

The absence of such models in previous research is due to the lack of a different view of leadership which goes beyond the existing and influential models at the macro-social level. This provides grounds for discussing the relevance of “transformative leadership” as it emerges in highly unpredictable cases.

The timeliness of the research on this category of women is emphasized by the subsequent events and changes taking place in the Arab World since the start of the so-called Arab Spring, while its legitimacy is drawn from the general all-encompassing problematic in the humanities having to do with social relationships and inclusion. As a matter of fact, development and democratization require the participation of all stakeholders alike, but the reality shows persistent gender inequality in terms of participation, on the one hand, and social inequality between women from the classes enjoying economic and social advantages and poor and vulnerable women, on the other. This could jeopardize social relations as it results, in most cases, in exclusion. Hence, our concern with the obstacles for these women to participate in civic and political life focuses on the feminine dimension, which includes poverty and marginalization, as well as on the gap in terms of participation opportunities between them and the other women.

The issue may, therefore, be set as follows: In the light of this, the research questions are: What are the obstacles to the participation of poor and marginalized women in civic and political life? And what strategies do some of them adopt to overcome the obstacles?

These questions are addressed in a comparative study involving four countries: Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and the occupied Palestinian territory. These questions will shed light on the differences and similarities between the cases in the four countries.

The methodology for this study was qualitative, using semi-structured interviews and biographies within an interactive paradigm which aimed to understand participation, as a social act, by analyzing its objective and personal motives and significance. The study also adopted a gender-based approach in order to identify the hidden mechanisms which hindered women's participation in political life in terms of power relations between the sexes. A common method was adopted to begin with a general background presentation of the countries covered in the study, with specifics on each location, followed by a presentation of indicators of women's participation in politics and the public sphere. Then, a review of the most relevant literature would follow in order to highlight the contribution of this study.

This regional report is a synthesis of the four parallel country studies carried out following an agreed participatory approach, enriched by discussion and critique, under the supervision of a team of experts.

Section I. Obstacles to women's participation in civic and political life

Poverty stood out as a major obstacle which the women interviewed concurred on in response to the questions on their respective situations. The analysis revealed that poverty seemed to be an incidental phenomenon, tied to particular causes, and that it, in turn, was causing other, no less important, phenomena to prevent women's participation in civic and/or political life.

The study has shown that the major factors which increase poverty included rural exodus and the difficulty to achieve integration into, or belonging to, a marginalized area, given the poor infrastructure and absence of state institutions and structures and their remoteness from the associations and individuals working on economic and political empowerment. This makes it practically unavoidable for girls to drop out of school. Poverty is, in fact, a distinctive feminine phenomenon since girls are impacted differently from boys as far as pursuing their education or dropping out to take care of the family, or for lack of financial means.

The non-schooling of girls or their dropping out of school prevents them from developing their professional capacities, thus restricting their activities to small, casual, low-wage jobs. This drives them into a vicious circle which is difficult to break, starting with marginalization and ending with exclusion. Early marriage particularly in Yemen, as illustrated by the sample studied there makes matters worse, together with the lack of social recognition of women's roles even when they are the sole family providers.

In sum, poverty, gender and marginalization represent, together, the obstacles to women's civic and political participation, although gender remains the major obstacle. Poverty and marginalization have a dialectical link and are especially increased by gender's relationships. This calls for reconsidering the obstacles in terms of how they work in combination, rather than separately.

Furthermore, the study has revealed other obstacles which required a deeper exploration of the informants' discourse. There was a lack of self-confidence shown in the way the women introduced themselves and defined their roles. For even though

their communicative abilities could be closely linked to their educational background or civil-society or political-party involvement, or any other activity, they were an indication of a lack of autonomy and a weak sense of belonging to their community, which led to self-exclusion among this category of women.

There was also a lack of the macro-social dimension in the self-introductions recorded in the study, as there was no mention of citizenship, unless it was brought up by the investigator in contexts where an individual informant would situate herself to speak about, or consider, her identity.

As for the attempt to form a view of politics and the overall situation, the study highlighted four categories of women:

1. Women who were completely unable to debate political matters;
2. Women who refused to talk about public or political matters, considering it somewhat of 'a luxury' given the state of deprivation they live in;
3. A third category whose discourse echoed prevailing pronouncements and views (lack of purpose, etc.);
4. A category of women who expressed a structured, rational view of political matters

The ability to communicate is related to having the capacities and tools to participate in civic and political life. This also reveals what Daniel Gaxie calls "le cens caché"⁽¹⁾ a hidden kind of censorship imposed on some individuals as a result of inequality, which undermines their ability to understand 'public matters' and stems, according to him, from a class norm (habitus), thus constituting another form of exclusion.

We conclude from this that the lack of communicative abilities is the level that uncovers a junction between personal and structural factors which hinder the individual's sense of belonging to the community, i.e. hinder a woman's representation of herself as a member of the community (a social being) and, hence, a citizen with the same rights and duties as others (a political being).

1. Gaxie, D, « Le cens caché », Paris, Seuil, Réseaux, 1987, volume 5, n°22, pp. 29-51.

Accordingly, we may argue for the necessity to implement a project to integrate women in their national community at several levels, in particular at the level of building their capacity to formulate views and engage in dialog and debate by involving them in the discussion of reform or development projects in their regions. This would require, for instance, organizing dialog sessions that start with issues closely tied to their reality so as to highlight the relationship between that reality and the broader political situation.

Paul Ricoeur says: “The first means to achieve equal opportunities relates to equality in terms of the capacity to speak, express oneself, explain, argue and debate”⁽²⁾

Comprehensive list of the obstacles

Obstacles common to the four countries	Obstacles proper to Yemen	Obstacles proper to The occupied Palestinian territory
Geographical belonging	Early marriage	The occupation
Poverty	Opposition to women's employment	
Dropping out of school	Deteriorating security situation	
Illiteracy (proper to Yemen; Morocco, Alnif)	A particular understanding of religion	
Low-wage jobs for women in agriculture and crafts		
Family roles		

2. Ricoeur, P, « Autonomie et vulnérabilité » in Le juste, Paris, Esprit, 2001, p. 90

Lack of social recognition		
Dual division of social space		
Lack of practical and professional capacities		
Lack of political education		
Weak or non-existent sense of citizenship		
Negative perception of women		
Lack of self-confidence		

By insisting on the obstacles hindering women’s participation in political and civic life, the study attempted to highlight the cause and effect relationship between them. However, to understand their exact role, one needs to investigate each informant’s position in her family and her close social relationships.

Section II. The Relational system and the importance of the relational approach

Based on the school of social psychology, and most particularly Bateson's Systemic Theory, individual acts, "choices" and profiles can be better understood if they are identified within the relational circle, or rather within the system of relations inside their context.

The field study in the four countries has shown that the family, in particular, plays a major role in shaping the girls' profile. This is clear through the family influence represented by the father, or his representative, as the highest authority in the family on the daughter's decisions with regard to pursuing her education, dropping out of school, marriage, work, travel, choosing a specialty, etc. Family relationships in Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and the occupied Palestinian territory are still based on a hierarchical structure. However, we could perceive a wave of change, in families in the Maghreb in particular, oscillating between the traditional authoritarian model and the relational model, which, according to De Singly, tries to grant a range of freedom to individuals for their autonomous development.

The interviews have also uncovered the existence of the two major processes of social upbringing, namely transmission and internalization. While transmission refers to transferring and teaching values, knowledge, rules, etc., internalization refers to the process of receiving and accepting on the part of children by focusing on assimilation. A number of stereotypes were identified and analyzed as having been adopted by some of the women in the sample relating to social roles and to civic and political activity. These appeared as preeminently patriarchal.

It should be noted that violence against women in the four countries, be it symbolic, verbal or physical, proves that male dominance still takes traditional forms, including exercising authority on women, and new forms through assigning them the financial responsibility to provide for the family as one more role in addition to caring for the children and doing the housework, but without any social recognition or any opportunities to engage in civil-society (non-profit) activities or political activism (a preeminently male-dominated area).

Women's going out to the extended space already predetermined for them does not exceed the work space that allows them to bring in extra income. Thus, in addition to the chores assigned to them, and which already shackle them in the private sphere, women find their access to the public realm restricted even further so that they may not develop an interest in public and political affairs and take part in them.

Therefore, there have been some changes and improvements in women's situation in the Arab region. The field study has shown that men no longer object to women's work outside the household, which indicates that the dual division of the public space has changed. However, the restrictions and reservations are maintained relative to women's mobility in the public realm. This draws new borders for a partial (restricted) public space reserved for women within the public realm and raises the question as to how to overstep such invisible borders, or break the glass ceiling, in addition to the other obstacles.

Section III. Ways to overcome the obstacles

The sample included women who moved from passivity to citizens' activism. Their participation could be divided into two types: formal, through membership in associations or political parties, and informal, through individual initiatives with or without collaboration with associations.

We may conclude from the women's experiences in the four countries that civil-society activism was so important and paved the way to political participation. The study helped distinguish the following kinds of women's participation:

- Organizing workshops and awareness raising meetings within an association or individually
- Teaching and raising literacy levels
- Vocational training
- Assisting the launch of small projects
- Organizing local popular demonstrations
- Achieving structural reforms at the local level
- Collaboration with associations and advising them to determine the region's priorities.

These efforts helped achieve changes including:

- Gaining social recognition and changing ideas about women
- Imposing the acceptance of women's employment in all kinds of jobs and professions without segregation
- Improving women's living conditions at the social and economic levels
- Improving local infrastructure and equipment
- Curtailing early marriage (in the districts of Zaidia and Sakhna in Yemen)
- Women starting an education and changing their views about women's issues
- Massive participation of the sensitized women in elections after past disinterest.

With regard to women's achievements, we tried to identify some of the men's overall attitudes towards effective women in public and political life. These attitudes may fit into two main categories: supportive and encouraging, on the one hand, and disapproving, on the other.

It is worth noting that the men who supported women's political participation still had some reservations, thus confirming their belief that there were limits to this participation. For them, women could not hold high positions given their "emotional nature." Some men in the sample talked about "masculine women" to highlight their boldness and success. This shows that "strength" is a male qualifier whereas "weakness" remains the qualifier for women.

All this means that exclusion, which took on a social and economic dimension in the initial analysis, was fundamentally a mental exclusion related to the inability to consider things differently. Therefore, the issue is not personal, but societal.

Despite this burdensome cultural heritage, several factors are competing to help women proceed to civic and political participation. Such factors are, according to the study:

- A good or average educational level/asset
- Self-confidence, which counts among the personal factors
- Social recognition
- Family or husband's support
- Receiving training
- Membership in associations, which stood out as a major factor common to women in the four countries

As for the obstacles that women face when they play transformative roles in the local environment, they revolve around the following:

- Inadequate financial means
- The masculine mindset
- Customs and traditions
- A particular understanding of religion (in Yemen and The occupied Palestinian territory)

- Harassment and aggression from opponents to their activities
- The roles assigned to women in the private realm
- Membership in political parties: a source of conflict or prioritizing the party's immediate interest over the public interest.

To overcome such a range of obstacles and their difficulties, women use various strategies which are:

- Mastering communication techniques and adapting them to the community where they are active
- Adopting the avoidance technique with regard to customs and traditions (in the occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen)
- Networking with foreign associations and organizations to garner financial support and benefit from their expertise
- Receive training and attending courses
 - ✓ Developing collaborative pedagogical experience
- Turning obstacles into incentives
 - ✓ Participation as an adventure (starting with limited or no resources and without any guarantees of success or a precise idea about the course to be taken)
- Engaging in civil society activities in general (a transition period in the individual's experience)
- Undertaking sensitization activities within one's professional activity or through joining associations or launching them in order to change one's own reality (compensatory participation)
- Cunning and circumventing social norms relating to one's civil status and social situation (decisions regarding divorce/marriage/adoption, etc.)
- Achieving financial autonomy through:
 - ▶ Taking a loan
 - ▶ Learning a trade
 - ▶ Taking small jobs and employing women in the neighborhood

The last two strategies concern Morocco specifically as they appear in the case studies to be crucial in achieving financial independence and giving change a preeminently economic dimension. In contrast, change in Tunisia is focused on women's condition in general and in all the areas, which makes it multi-dimensional. In the occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen, and given the crisis situations respectively due to the occupation and to deteriorating security as well as the difficulty to subject customs and traditions to reconsideration and revision, we can perceive the signs of partial change which includes women's issues within the public interest realm so that such issues may be well-received.

Comprehensive list of the strategies

Strategies common to the four countries	Strategies specific to Morocco	Strategies specific to Tunisia	Strategies specific to the occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen
Achieving financial independence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a loan • Launching small projects • Learning a trade • Taking small jobs etc... 	Improving the economic situation: the way to participation	Changing the obstacles into incentives and taking advantage of favorable opportunities	Acquisition of communication techniques (communication with women during visits and in face-to-face meetings to get their approval)
Taking training sessions and attending meetings	Cunning and circumventing social norms (decision to divorce, marrying with a supportive husband, adoption, etc.)	Undertaking sensitization activity within professional activity	Using the avoidance strategy regarding customs and traditions
Joining associations or political parties			Including a project in favor of women within public interest projects

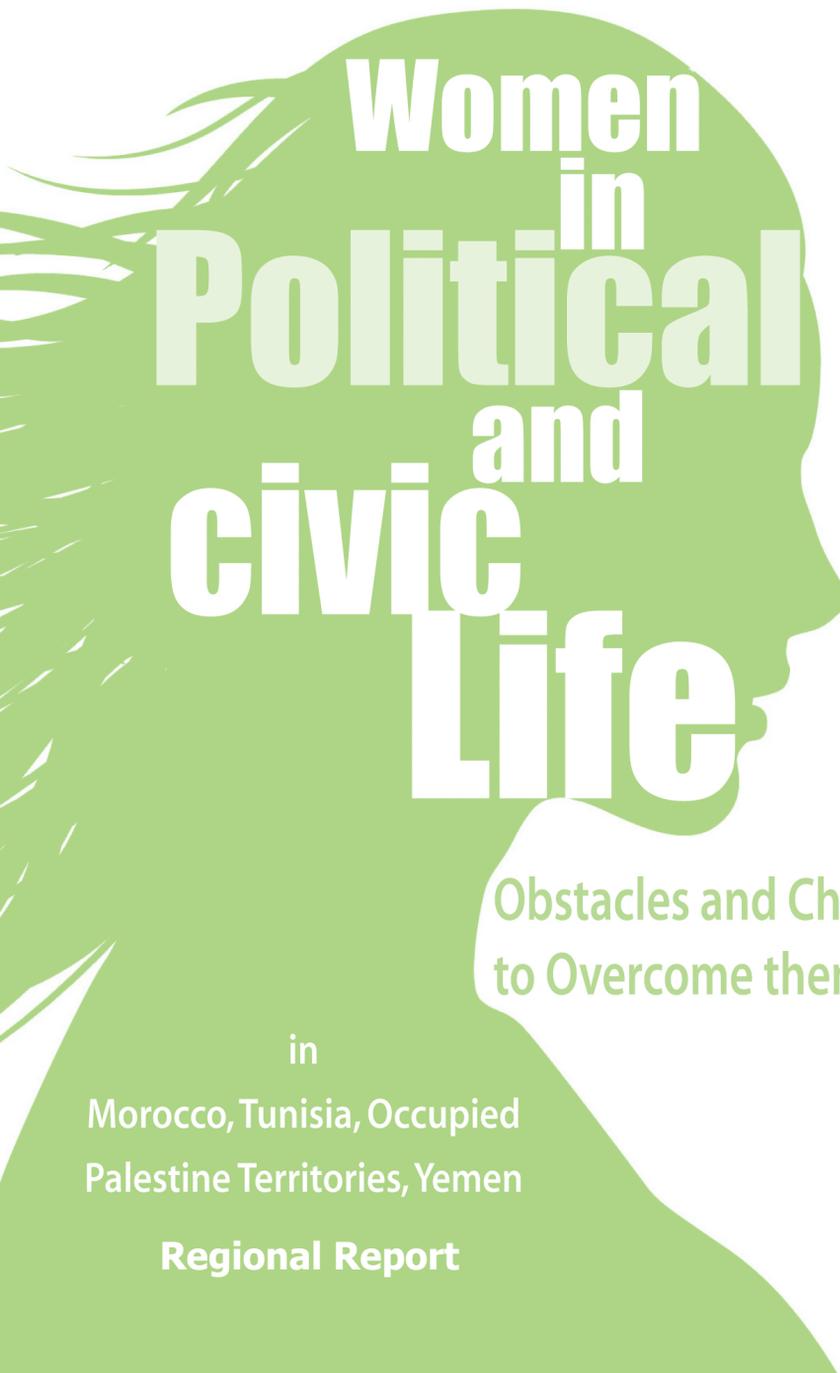
Conclusion

The models derived in the light of this study about effective and influential women at the local level represent a promise of the sustainability of different kinds of activities that could bring about new measures to consolidate women's participation in civic and political life. However, the obstacles persistently strengthen the citizenship gap between men and women and between women enjoying economic and social advantages and poor marginalized women.

This study purported to interrogate reality in order to identify the mechanisms and significance of participatory action for the sake of establishing qualitative grounds for fighting exclusion, social marginalization and political dysfunctions which stand behind the apparent disconnect between a particular category of women and what transpires in civic and political life.

The study culminated in the introduction of a new meaning for leadership which expresses the centrality of transformation in understanding evolving leadership with its motivations and objectives. These objectives serve the purpose of effecting social change which will, in the long run, transform society, particularly as regards women's situation in it.

To conclude, even though governed by the ebb and flow dictated by circumstances, contexts and the legislation in force, women's participation in civic and political life enjoys unique currency. Such currency, or timeliness, makes any act aiming at boosting or spreading it an ideal means to recognize the undiminished citizenship of women and their role in the relentless transformations.



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Preamble

In the aftermath of the Arab revolutions and subsequent events which started in 2011 in Tunisia and quickly spread to Egypt, Syria and Yemen, as well as to Morocco with the '20 February Movement,' there has been a strong return to "politics" in social activism, thus contributing significantly to the restructuring of Arab societies.

In the midst of these developments ravaging the Arab region and putting an end to decades of immobilism, it is important to question the role of actors, and the people at large, in fulfilling their political obligation through effective participation in public life, the purpose being to establish a civil society which is not excluded from politics, but rather involved and influential in it as part of the democratization and developmental process. However, a close look at the reality of political and civic participation in the Arab world reveals a first imbalance between actors, i.e. between men and the younger generation of males and females, and a second imbalance concerning women and conveying the meaning of segregation in terms of their exclusion or elimination from the political and civic realms. But this perspective does not cancel the argument that women themselves may be the ones who maintain this distance from "political involvement," which calls for this issue to be understood in terms of the social reality and with reference to the system of gender relations and social representations.

This issue takes on greater importance if considered in the case of Tunisia, the cradle of Arab revolutions, or Morocco which initiated constitutional reform to preempt scenarios similar to those in neighboring countries. It is also relevant in Yemen where there has been unprecedented social and political unrest and ethnic war, or in Palestine where Israeli occupation is the driver of social and political action.

In all four countries, representing the geographical scope of this study, the significant participation of women in demonstrations and sit-ins made them partners in the political transformations, but without giving them access to decision-making positions or allowing for the inclusion of poor marginalized women.

Thus, another gap is added to the gender gap as a result of social inequality, which is exacerbated by a culture bent on keeping it unchanged.

These factors, taken together, have motivated the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and Oxfam to develop research on the obstacles hindering the participation of women, poor and marginalized women, in particular, in political and civic life, with a special focus on the similarities and differences between the target countries in North Africa and the Middle East: Morocco, Tunisia, Occupied Palestine territories and Yemen.

General framework of the national studies

This section presents a general description of the different sites of the study, bearing in mind that the field work covered three locations in each country. Along with the specification of the research context characteristics, this description allows for developing a representation of the women's situation in each country, the reality of their participation in the political scene and the issues dealt with in the main studies in Morocco, Tunisia, The occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen. It also helps to explore the similarities and differences between the four countries and to evaluate the contribution of this study to current knowledge.

Methodology of the national studies

Features of the Tunisian context

Based on the methodological choices adopted in the Tunisian study,⁽³⁾ involving the balanced coverage of urban areas as well as marginalized ones with low economic indicators and political participation rates, the following three governorates were selected: Nabeul, Jendouba and Gabes.

The selection of the research sites in the national Tunisian study took into consideration demographic, economic and social variables as much as possible, relying on population density as well as economic and social characteristics, such as the importance of productive activity and poverty levels. Thus, Nabeul stood out as one of the geographical regions where tourism and industry were predominant activities, in contrast to Gabes, where such activities were less common. As for Jendouba, it had the highest poverty rate, coupled with the lowest level of industrial activity and the predominance of agriculture.

3. Tunisian national report, on women in political and public life 2016 non published, Cawtar

- **Indicators of women’s participation in politics and public life**

The presence of women on the political scene was consolidated in the wake of the Tunisian revolution with the creation of the High Commission for Achieving the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition which underscored the desire of Tunisian women to assert themselves in the political reform process. Indeed, there were 42 women among the members of this body, out of a total of 155, i.e. 26.4% of the membership.

In the same context, the October 2011 elections allowed women to express their interest in participating in the process and contributing to it, with 45% of the registered voters, 5502 candidates, around 128 heads of election lists out of 1524. The election lists headed by women included 85 party and 43 independent lists. The first constitutional election results also allowed women to win 23% of the seats in the National Constituent Assembly, that is, 62 women out of 217 representatives. The number of female representatives rose to 68 in the 2014 elections to the Peoples Representative Assembly (out of 217), with a rate of 31% (see Table 1, below).

Table 1. Women candidates as heads of lists in the 2011 and 2014 elections

Legislative elections 2011			Legislative elections 2014		
Total of lection lists	Lists headed by women	Rate	Total of lection lists	Lists headed by women	Rate
1524	128	9%	1326	148	11%

Source: Statistics of High Independent Election commission, 2011 and 2014

However, women’s occupancy of ministerial and other high-level positions in government during the transition period is one of the indicators showing their limited opportunities in the political sphere overall. Their presence as members of government has not surpassed 7% in the best of cases. The Constitution of January 2014 included a number of positive and encouraging provisions, with Article 46 stipulating that the State “guarantees equal opportunities for men and women to hold positions of responsibility in all areas.” This legislative orientation was consolidated by guaranteeing women’s representation in elected bodies, as stipulated in the last paragraph of Article 34 in the Constitution stating that the State “endeavors to ensure women’s representation in elected bodies⁽⁴⁾” so as to fulfill the principle of gender parity (see Table 2, below).

Table 2. Women in ministerial positions in transition governments (2011-2015)

Mohamed Ghannouchi Government: January-February 2011	Number of Ministers	Men	Women
	37	35	2
Beji Qaid Essebsi Government : February-December 2011	30	28	2
Hammadi Jebali Government: December-March 2013	41	38	2 1 (Secretary of State)
Ali Laaraidh Government: March 2013	38	35	1 2 (Secretary of State)
Mehdi Jomaa Government: January 2015	29	26	2 1 (Secretary of State)
Habib Essid Government: March 2015-January 2016	27	24	1 7 (Secretary of State)
Habib Essid 2 nd Government: January 2016	29	26	3

Source: Women’s participation in public and union life in the Maghreb countries. Synthesis Report of Studies per Country. USTMA, Tunis 2012 (updated)⁽⁵⁾

4. Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia, 2014.
 5. Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia, January 2014

Overall, the representation of Tunisian women in the public arena may be considered significant, as demonstrated by their presence in administrative bodies and participation in the elections, in addition to their election registration and candidacy rates. Subsequent legislation relating to women's participation in political life and guaranteeing their basic rights may be used to advantage, in contrast to the situation in other Arab countries.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning Tunisia's political commitment to the issues of gender equality which is clear in the Code of Personal Status (CPS). This code upholds civic, official marriage as the only legally recognized venture and considers acquiescence as an essential condition for establishing the marriage contract. On this basis, Tunisian law has set the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 for both sexes and regulated the procedure for divorce so that it may only be implemented through the courts while also guaranteeing the woman's right to seek divorce.

As for civic identity, Tunisian law guarantees, for girls and boys alike, the right to have their father's name from birth, whether the birth is within or out of wedlock, as stipulated in Article 68 of the CPS and the law on assigning the family name to children of unknown parents of 28 October 1998. However, this law was amended in 2004 to give the mother the possibility to give her name to her child from an unknown father and claim a DNA test to prove fatherhood. Tunisian law also addressed the issue of polygamy making it illegal, with Article 38 of the Civic Code requiring proof of celibacy or divorce prior to establishing a marriage contract.

Tunisia has made great strides in establishing gender equality and scored exceptional achievements in this regard compared to other Arab countries. Actually, the international conventions, which Tunisia has ratified, have played a big role in modifying Tunisian legislation to facilitate the transition from defending acquired rights to scoring achievements and implementing them. Perhaps the most important of such conventions has been CEDAW, which cancelled all forms of segregation against women and against which Tunisia removed all reservations in October 2011; that is, in the wake of the revolution which brought about greater levels of women's participation in drawing the lines of the new political phase and which is reflected in a number of writings and studies.

- **Literature Review on women's participation in political and civic life in Tunisia**

The Tunisian study chose from the previous research review on women's political participation the variable of knowledge development as one of the methodological options to select research studies. In other words, the focus was on the extent of diversity and novelty of research issues in the literature, rather than on their recurrence. This was deemed to help determine the knowledge development achieved in the studies that revolved around women's participation in politics in Tunisia. For this reason, the focus was on the key academic and literary studies which dealt with women's political and civic participation in the period from 2005 to 2014, dividing them into those published before and those after the revolution.

In the same vein, it was noted that academic and literary research in Tunisia prior to 2010 took various forms and adopted different methodological and theoretical courses of action while focusing mainly on "women's participation in political and public life" and "women's participation in decision taking/making." Participation in political life was integrated in participation in public life on the grounds that the political realm is one of the constituents of public life. The literature review in Tunisia started with reference to a major study in the same context entitled *Research on the political participation of women in the MENA region in the period 2005-2013: Thoughts on the state of the art* ⁽⁶⁾, based on a broad range of studies and articles from more than 12 Arab countries.

Most of the literary works published before 2011 were categorized according to the knowledge issues covered into three different categories, the first being the studies dealing with "women's participation in public life" as a whole. The second category included the issues related to aspects of "women's participation in decision making in public life and taking decisions within the family (social life)," thus putting the spotlight on the extent of women's participation in decision making after having had the opportunity to participate actively and numerically in the realm of public affairs. The study by Sihem Najjar and Mohamed Karrou entitled *Action research on the political participation of women at the local level in Tunisia* ⁽⁷⁾ is the most prominent in this category.

6. Maryam Ben Salem, *Recherches sur la Participation politique des femmes dans la région MENA dans la période 2005-2013, Réflexions sur l'Etat des lieux*, CAWTAR-Stokholm University, Tunis, 2013.

7. Sihem Najjar et Mohamed Kerrou, *Recherche-action sur la participation politique des femmes au niveau local en Tunisie, In projet «Renforcement du leadership féminin et de la participation des femmes à la vie politique et au processus de prise des décisions en Algérie, au Maroc et en Tunisie»*, UN-INSTRAW, CAWTAR, 2009.

Concerning the literary and academic studies published after the start of the Tunisian revolution, the emphasis was put on the notable and direct change in the substance of the research overall. The major developments that have occurred in the meantime include the reconsideration of “women’s rights,” “women’s political participation,” the role of women in ensuring the success of “the democratic transition” and “consolidating the fundamentals of democracy.” The study entitled *Profil genre de la Tunisie (Gender profile of Tunisia)* received paramount attention in the review of the post-revolution literature given that it covered the status of women and their chances and representation in all areas of public life (political, economic, social, etc.).

As with the references published before the revolution, the post-revolution studies were divided in two categories. The first included the bulk of academic and literary studies revolving around “women’s political participation between representations and practice.” The study entitled *Politics and young vulnerable women in Tunisia: A qualitative study, Gafsa-Kasserine-Tozeur* ⁽⁸⁾, was among the studies that focused on the nature of vulnerable young women’s representations and views of the politic realm in three small geographical and social locations.

The second category comprised the literary studies revolving around “women’s participation in terms of their involvement in civil structures, unions and political organizations.” The study entitled *Women and political participation: The experience of political parties, trade unions and professional associations* ⁽⁹⁾ as well as the research articles published in *Cawtariet*, entitled *Women and elections in the Arab World* ⁽¹⁰⁾ were among the studies that were focused upon, showing, in particular, that obstacles included lack of confidence, the lack of freedom afforded to women in political parties and absence of political education in the social environment.

The literature review on Tunisia may be considered a synthesis review covering the main studies focused on the two themes of women and participation in public life and the various angles of addressing research issues. Thus, the wealth of knowledge in the Tunisian literature review reflects the dynamism of women at various levels in the public realm.

8. Maryam Ben Salem, Soumaya Ben cheikh, *Politiques et Jeunes femmes vulnérables en Tunisie, Etude qualitative, Gafsa-Kasserine-Tozeur*, CAWTAR-UNESCO, Tunis, 2013.

9. حفيظة شقير، محمد شفيق صرصار، النساء والمشاركة السياسية، تجربة الأحزاب السياسية والنقابات والجمعيات المهنية، المعهد العربي لحقوق الإنسان، ماي 2014.

10. كوثريات، المرأة والانتخابات في العالم العربي، نشرية صادرة عن مركز المرأة العربية للتدريب والبحوث (كوثر)، عدد خاص، سبتمبر 2012.

Features of the Moroccan context

Three main research sites were selected in the national study in the Kingdom of Morocco: Rabat, Meknes and Alnif. As in the Tunisian case, the national study in Morocco obeyed more or less the same criteria in that the Rabat area was considered among the Moroccan regions with high demographic density, a variety of economic activities and a low poverty rate relative to the national average. The Meknes area, on the other hand, was mostly urban, with the involvement of women in the craft sector, in addition to the high proportion of self-employed women. As for the Alnif area, it was mostly rural, with high poverty and low literacy rates, particularly among women.

• Indicators of Moroccan women's participation in politics and the public realm

The Moroccan study has shown that the involvement of women in politics is weak, given their absence from positions of political power, for women entered parliament only in 1993 with just two representatives. Starting from 2002, though, the situation has improved in elected institutions, as agreement was negotiated by the political parties to reserve 30 seats for women while 5 more representatives won on local lists, thus reaching 11% of the total number of representatives in People's Assembly.

Moreover, 7 women were appointed as ministers in the first transitional government, and 5 in the government preceding that of 2011, in addition to appointing 5 female ambassadors out of a total of 25.⁽¹¹⁾ Then, in the legislative elections of 2011 held to select the full 395 members of the People's Assembly, women's representation improved as a result of the national consensus to reserve 90 parliamentary seats, 60 for women and 30 for young people.⁽¹²⁾

11. عزيز ياكوش، «مكتسيات النساء المغربيات في العهد الجديد»، الحوار المتمدن العدد 29 / 06 / 2010 - 3048 : <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=220816>

12. عصام العدوني، «المشاركة السياسية للمرأة المغربية: مكتسيات ومعيقات» منبر الحرية، 07 غشت 2014 : <http://minbaralhurriyya.org/index.php/archives/8901>

Table 3. Moroccan women’s participation in local and regional elections 2015

Year	Voters		Candidates		Winners	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Local elections 2015	55%	45%	78.05%	21.95%	78.82%	21.18%
Regional elections 2015	55%	45%	61.36%	38.64%	62.39%	37.61%

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Morocco.

However, the Moroccan study has shown that, in spite of these important statistics, women’s access to high-ranking positions in public administration remained low in comparison to men’s. In 2001, the rate of women in such positions reached 10%, and then 16% in 2013, when 88% of the women held positions of Head of Department or Section (see Table 4, below).

Table 4. Moroccan women candidates to leadership positions

Year	Number of candidates	Number of women candidates	Number of voters	Number of women voters
2009	130305	20500	27779	3428
	Community Councils		1289	29
	Regional Councils		1220	27
	Parliament		325	30
	Council of the Wise		270	6
2011	Parliament		395	67

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Morocco.

The Moroccan national study reached the basic conclusion that women’s political participation has increased significantly since the last decade of this century. While women used to constitute a reservoir of votes for political parties and candidates, some managed to run for office and gain access to elected local and national institutions.

On the legislative and legal fronts, Morocco has seen, in the last two decades, legislative and political reforms for the sake of empowering women and alleviating their exclusion and marginalization. The Family Code of 2004 introduced amendments of personal status law to harmonize it with economic, social and cultural changes taking place in Moroccan society.

The new code included a number of gains, such as stipulating the rights to travel without restrictions, to seek divorce and to have child custody, in addition to legislation reform, such as the laws requiring a wife to have her husband’s permission to engage in commerce, and the Labor Code which granted women the right to work as well as the right to establish a work contract and to receive equal pay. New legislation has also

considered marriage as a variable through raising the legal age to 18 for both males and females. Given the role women play in Moroccan society, at the economic and social levels, the decision to get married has become a prerogative for adult women, in addition to granting them the right to seek divorce and priority for child custody.

Moroccan women's participation in public life, as supported by the statistics included in the national study, may be considered very significant and the clearest proof of that resides in the rates of participation in local elections, the proportion of seats in parliament and the rates of participation and candidacy in the last elections.

• **Literature review on women's participation in political and civic life in Morocco**

Most of the Moroccan literary and academic studies revolved around several topics covering the legal, economic and social aspects. As in the the other country studies, the review covered the key research relating to Moroccan women's participation in political and civic life, dividing publications into those appearing before and after 2011. The Moroccan study managed to categorize the issues treated in the research literature published between 2005 and 2011 under the following three main themes:

- **Feminism and early reform**, in terms of the progress made through the demands of the women's movement, which in and of itself reflects the socio-demographic progress in Moroccan society;
- **Manifestations of political and economic empowerment**, where issues in some research studies revolved around the major economic transformations and their impact on the extent of active women's participation, which remained dependent on vulnerable situations as well as on productive female behaviors and practices that were never taken into account or actually evaluated.
- **Women's participation in political life**, where the focus was on the rates and statistics showing women's presence in high political, and decision-making, positions. The Moroccan study concluded that most studies used the "quota" as starting research variable to analyze its effectiveness in promoting Moroccan women's participation in political life.

Concerning the literary and academic research published after 2011, the Moroccan national study showed that most studies were the result of the social and political activism in Morocco at the time. In fact, some Moroccan civic coalitions were formed, such as the Women's Spring Coalition for Democracy and Equality which included 30 organizations and managed to achieve some positive results, including the removal of some objections to the principles of the CIDAW. The Moroccan study focused on the results of the report entitled *The Arab World: What Spring for Women?*⁽¹³⁾, which highlighted the existence of a number of social, economic and legal obstacles to women's participation in public life on an equal footing with men.

The Moroccan study concluded that the political and social dynamism did not have the expected positive impacts on the situation of women. Although women played an important role in the Arab Spring, their political participation and representation were below aspirations. The study noted that the Social and Economic Council's Report⁽¹⁴⁾ came to the conclusion that whatever the importance of the national election lists in consolidating women's participation, they remained inadequate for improving such participation; some additional measures were needed in the election system, the representative bodies, public administration as well as the judiciary system. This is because of the importance of equality between men and women in public and political participation and the crucial role it plays in the country's economic progress and in achieving social integration.

Features of the Yemeni context

Given the methodological requirements adopted in the national Yemeni study,⁽¹⁵⁾ three geographical areas were selected to match the other national studies. Thus, the three provinces chosen were Sanaa, Hadida and Hadramaut. Sanaa is a bigger urban center than Hadramaut, which is more or less balanced in terms of urban and rural areas, and to Hadida, which is predominantly rural. Hadramaut has the highest poverty rate and its economy relies mainly on agriculture, fishing and livestock breeding. Hadida is next, with nearly the same poverty rate and economic activity, focusing on farming and fishing. Sanaa, the capital, has a relatively lower poverty rate, with a notable level of mendicity and destitution as result of exodus and migration.

13. الفيدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان / العالم العربي: أي ربيع للنساء؟ باريس 2012.

14. http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/28_05_12_women_ar_final.pdf Conseil économique, social et environmental, La promotion de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes dans la vie économique, sociale, culturelle et politique. Concrétiser l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes, une responsabilité de tous : concepts, recommandations normatives et institutionnelles», Rabat, 2012. <http://www.cese.ma/Documents/PDF/Avis-egalite-Volet1-VF.pdf>

15. نجاة الصائم.

- **Indicators of Yemeni women’s participation in politics and the public realm**

The national Yemeni study pointed out official and non-official national efforts to promote women’s participation in political life. Even though the Yemeni constitution of 1991 guaranteed the right for women to engage in politics, the political activism registered since 2011 has had a negative impact on the situation of women, since the involvement of some Islamist and reform political parties in the demonstrations has reinstated the division and separation of men and women.

Table 5. Yemeni women’s participation rates in the 2003 elections

Year	Voters		Candidates		Winners	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2003	57.8%	42.2%	99.3%	0.7%	99.7%	0.3%

Source: High Commission for Elections, 2003

The Yemen study concluded that there were several crises during the democratic transition period that have completely undone many achievements, including women’s participation in public life. These conclusions were based on the results of a study undertaken by the Yemeni Public Polling Center, entitled *The voices of women in the new Yemen*, which noted that “in spite of three years having gone by in the transition period, the situation of women has not improved at all and the deterioration of the security and economic situation has had a negative impact on women more than men. Women have asserted that the demonstrations have led to a series of crises which increased the rate of poverty and eventually made their lives much worse».⁽¹⁶⁾

16. المركز اليمني لقياس الرأي العام، أصوات النساء في اليمن الجديد، 2014.

The participation rate of women in the elections may be considered an additional indicator, among others, showing the extent of their involvement in public affairs. The national study noted that the first participation was in the context of the Yemeni unification declaration and constitutional referendum, when the first election round was considered a step forward for women through raising awareness about the importance of participating and casting one's vote as well as registering to vote in the different election rounds.

Table 6. Yemeni women’s participation in parliamentary elections (1993 – 2003)

Election year	Voters			Candidates			Winners		
	Male	Female	Female rate	Male	Female	Female rate	Male	Female	Female rate
1993	2209944	478379	17.8%	3181	42	1.3%	299	2	0.6%
1997	3364723	1304550	38.8%	3791	23	0.6%	299	2	0.6%
2003	4682048	3415114	42%	1529	11	0.7%	300	1	0.3%

Source: High Commission for the Elections, Results of parliamentary elections, 1993, 1997, 2003.
http://www.ndi.org/files/1702_yemen_elect_rep_arabic.pdf

The Yemeni national study concluded that Yemeni women are present in political parties, mostly in the base rather than at the top, i.e. in the higher party structures. Their membership in political parties and organizations on the political scene in Yemen ranges from 25% to 50%.

On the legislative and legal front, the Yemeni Constitution equal treatment between men and women before the courts, giving each citizen -man or woman- the right to resort to them to protect his/her legitimate rights and interests as well as the right to file complaints with the state institutions and structures.

Yemeni Election and Referendum Law states the right of women to vote, run for office and participate in any referendum on the Constitution, without any distinction between men and women, considering both of them fully apt and responsible. Election law relating to the selection of local, regional and provincial councils also states the right of women to vote and run for office in these structures in order to match developments in Yemen and implement the principle of administrative decentralization.

Bearing in mind the special security and social circumstances prevailing in Yemen since 2011, women's situation has become quite vague and complex. Most official statistics have lost their substance, due to the deteriorating and changing situation in the last four years, and this is why the national study relied on statistical data from before 2011 while noting their diminished reliability and validity relative to the present time. Still, such circumstances cannot hide the fact that the situation of Yemeni women and their participation in the public realm have been undermined.

Literature review on women's participation in political and civic life in Yemen

The Yemeni study covered most of the literary and academic research on Yemeni women in the period 2005-2011, with a focus on the various knowledge aspects relevant to the issue of women's political participation, as was the case in the other field studies. The study revealed that most research studies focused on women's participation in political life, paying attention to its manifestation in their participation in the election process as a whole and overlooking only few studies that dealt with women's participation in the development process. The main studies covered in the review included, in particular, (1) *The political role of Yemeni women from a gender perspective*, (2) *A survey of political empowerment projects for women in the Republic of Yemen (1995-2005)* and (3) *Obstacles to the political participation of Yemeni women*.

As for the remaining research published after 2011, they generally highlighted the regression of women's participation, considering it in the context of the social demonstrations that were held in Yemen since 2011. The literature review showed that most of the published research underscored the worsening condition of women, compared to previous times, as a result of the absence of state institutions and lack of

security. However, these studies overlooked the representations and perceptions of Yemeni women's political participation, in particular. The following studies received the bigger focus in this regard: the Oxfam report entitled *They're still waiting for change, the study on The political participation of women in the demonstrations for change in Yemen, and The battle of Yemeni women in the transitional phase*.

Features of the occupied palestinian terretory context

The choice in the Palestinian study settled on three geographical areas representing the urban and rural environments, namely the provinces of Salfit, Jerusalem and Central Ghaza. In Salfit, the economy relies on farming and work in the private sector while in Ghaza it mostly involves farming, and in Jerusalem, commerce and small workshops. Salfit has poor infrastructure and a limited number of businesses, due to widespread settlement activity. Likewise, Jerusalem is negatively impacted by the isolation policy imposed by the occupier while Ghaza undergoes vast bulldozing operations and incursions.

Indicators of Palestinian women's participation in politics and the public realm

The Palestinian study noted that, at the legislative level, the West Bank is still ruled by the provisional Jordanian CPS of 1976, in contrast to Ghaza where the Family Code of 1954 is still enforced. The study was limited to results based on analyzing the prevailing legal and legislative status of Palestinian women through a reading of the legal texts, understanding how they are implemented and exploring the extent to which they are fair to women.

The perusal of the data of the Central Office of Statistics for 2014 has shown that women's share in the service sector reached 59.3%, and in agriculture, 20.9%, while in financial institutions it remained low at 28%, against 72% for men⁽¹⁷⁾.

The Palestinian study noted that Jordanian law set the marriage age for girls at 15. As for divorce, it could follow two courses of action, either by the will of the husband or through the courts. Jordanian law also guaranteed women the right to repudiation,

17. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/default.aspx>

while both Jordanian law and the law applied in Ghaza granted women, whether married or divorced, custody of children underage.

As for the women’s political participation, the national study noted that it has been tied to historical cycles in Palestinian political process, indicating that it became more common after occupation. However, such participation receded in 2012, especially for women who were candidates on women’s lists and lost the elections.

Table 7. Palestinian women’s participation in election lists, 2012

	Number of lists			Number of candidates	
	Submitted lists	Refused lists	Withdrawing lists	Male	Female
Local elections of 2012	518	28	31	3.864	245.1
1 st complementary elections	107	5	13	739	262
2 nd complementary elections	48	0	0	275	105
Total	673	33	44	878.4	612.1

Source: Palestinian Central Election Commission, Report on local elections, 2012, OPT, p135

Palestinian women in Jerusalem, Salfit and the West Bank achieved relative success in local elections, with 20% in most provinces, but it is important to note that Palestinian women’s involvement in the political realm could not be distanced from the struggle to face colonial power. The following table shows the extent to which women took part in the last local elections (2012-2013), particularly in the areas covered by the study.

Table 8. Palestinian women’s participation in local elections (2012 – 2013) ⁽¹⁸⁾

Governorates	Voters		Candidates		Winners	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Jerusalem	52.5%	47.5%	78.2%	21.8%	79.5%	20.5%
Salft	51.5%	48.6%	71.2%	28.8%	79.1%	20.9%
West Bank	52.2%	47.8%	75.1%	24.9%	78.6%	21.4%

Source: Palestinian Central Election Commission

- Literature review on women’s participation in political and civic life in The occupied Palestinian territory**

Given the uniqueness of the Palestinian political and social context since 1948, the national study⁽¹⁹⁾ attempted to review the literature on Women’s political participation from a theoretical perspective based on the theories underpinning feminist trends. Thus, the focus was on the main knowledge references which strived to impose a particular feminist intellectual trend in sociological research.

The Palestinian study tried to shed light on the literary and academic research dealing with Palestinian women’s participation, considering their struggle against occupation and their involvement in local elections a basic element of this participation. The study also focused on women’s current involvement in political parties and trade unions and on the obstacles and opportunities, on the one hand, and on women’s participation in public and civic life in decision making positions, on the other.

18 لجنة الانتخابات المركزية الفلسطينية.

19 نداء البرغوثي ولونا سعادة: التقرير الوطني الفلسطيني حول المشاركة النسائية في الحياة السياسية والمدنية - العيقات وسبل التجاوز - مركز المرأة العربية للتدريب والبحوث. «كونتر» و«الأوكسفام» تقرير غير منشور.

The literature review concluded that the issues of Palestinian women's political participation in the periods preceding and following the Arab revolutions highlighted the presence of women on the political, social and economic scene. However, a critical reading of most of the literary works emphasized the separation between private and public matters in discussing political participation, which is quite prominent in the structure of official institutions in the public realm.

In conclusion, we may recognize one of the knowledge advantages of the comparative approach, namely the fact of highlighting the points of diversity and difference between contexts which are more similar in some respects, and distant in others, but which come together by being spaces for political and social activism that allows for exploring new positions for women. It noteworthy, in light of the presentation of the general context in the four countries, that women's participation in political life has seen somewhat variable, but incremental development, even though it was slow and of uncertain quality.

The notable promotion of women's participation in Morocco and Tunisia, compared to that in The occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen, is ascribed to new election laws which should not be seen in isolation from the overall legislative framework, political orientations and social transformations. The nature of Yemeni society, with its predominantly rural culture and high rates of poverty and unemployment, raises questions for this research project on the role of this specific feature in promoting or blocking change in terms of women's participation in civic and/or political life. It also raises the question about the strategies adopted by women to penetrate the realms monopolized by men, especially when the security situation breaks down. On the other hand, women's willingness to face foreign occupation in The occupied Palestinian territory and struggle against it has consolidated the politicization of Palestinian women, as seen in their high schooling rates, which facilitate political nurturing. However, the impact of these factors is not adequately reflected in women's representation in political positions.

The quantitative indicators discussed above do not allow for considering them a satisfying answer on participation, rather on women's participation. Instead, they pave the way for tabling the key issue and analyzing it. One of the main shortcomings of the studies reviewed above is the prominence given to quantitative considerations, at the expense of qualitative ones, which does not allow access to a true representation of

women's participation in politics and society. This is the pitfall of focusing on quantitative data and percentages while neglecting the unconventional forms and processes of women's participation and the added social value which may be inferred from the close study of evolving prevailing cultural stereotypes of the women's role in public life and their deeply rooted belief in equality, together with attempts to perceive the new range of freedom allocated to them while considering them a heterogeneous category. This calls upon us to see each experience as a unique individual process evolving in a specific social, political and economic context that would allow us to draw lessons from it and transfer to the rest of the community in the same country or in others. Thus, we see another advantage of the comparative approach adopted in this regional study.

A Field Study of the Obstacles and Opportunities for Women to Participate in Political and Civic Life

Introduction

Women's participation in public and political life is a central issue that may not be overlooked when considering the establishment of a democratic society without any signs of causes of inequality between men and women as they live their citizenship.

The concept of citizenship is holistic in the sense that it equates between men and women and between different social classes. However, the reality of women's participation in political life and their lack of access to decision-making positions reveal situations mostly characterized by inequality at two levels, the first between the sexes, and the second between educated women belonging to well-off social classes and women who are poor and marginalized.

This gap is reflected in research studies which, although valuable, often neglect exploring the profiles of women who are politically active and ignore those who started from difficult and complex social situations to challenge the circumstances and have an impact on civic and political life.

This provides a justification for this study on a matter of current concern that is worth investigating to meet several challenges, the most important of which is to pave the way for adopting laws and procedures and implementing them in order to establish democratic norms revolving around equality between the sexes and between different social classes.

Meeting this challenge requires specific knowledge of the various obstacles that hinder women's participation in civic and political life as well as an investigating the ways and means adopted by some women to switch from non-participation to participation. The research problem in this study may be articulated in the following questions:

1. What is preventing poor and marginalized women from being interested and participating in political and civic life?
2. What are the strategies adopted by some of these women to overcome such obstacles and play a transformative leadership role?

First, it is assumed that economic obstacles, though central, are not the only ones that maintain this apparent separation between women and politics. There are a series of additional obstacles, the first of which is discrimination between the sexes. Second, it is likely that the social model and the distribution of power within the family weighs heavily in maintaining women in seclusion from the public realm and manipulating them into submissiveness to a social system which chains them to negative roles and keeps them away from being effective and influential.

It is also assumed that the worsening economic situation and the lack of supporting factors do not make it impossible for some women to reach the level of active political and civic participation. It is actually possible to find examples of women who are effective at the local level and able to bring about change, which would allow for studying the strategies they adopted and developing models that may be followed or used to inspire solutions for the sake of promoting participation among poor and marginalized women, in particular.

Based on these assumptions, the answers to the research questions, above, will be presented in three sections revolving around two notions: first, the notion of non-participation, with an exposition of its causes and structural variables, both individual and social, to be covered in the first two sections; and the notion of participation, to be covered in the third section, with a focus on analyzing the strategies and possibilities and all that may help women to overcome obstacles and strive to influence public and/or political life, based on the cases investigated in Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and Occupied The occupied Palestinian territory.

Methodology and research techniques

This study relied essentially on a qualitative approach, using an intensive research technique, namely a semi-structured interview. This technique involves a series of questions revolving around a particular theme, with the possibility of straying away from the set questions as required by the “communication contract,” to borrow Alain Blanchet’s⁽²⁰⁾ words. This study falls within introspective sociology, focusing on the interaction between individuals in order to reach the meaning they assign to their behavior, actions and everything concerning their social existence.

Given this methodological choice, it was not important to have too many informants, but to select informants based on specific criteria. Therefore, targeted sampling was combined with snowball sampling in order to track the relationship networks and orient the investigators to identify particular individuals that would fit the selection criteria.

The sample for the study included 106 women more or less equally divided between the four countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and The occupied Palestinian territory), with a minimum of 22 in The occupied Palestinian territory, a maximum of 38 in Morocco and 23 in both Tunisia and Yemen.

Since the study relied on a gender-based analysis, it was necessary to conduct some interviews with men from different categories, but not necessarily from the informants’ environment. This was done to understand and analyze the various representations of masculinity and femininity and their relation to the political sphere. The Men’s sample included 31 subjects, which amounted to about a third of the women’s.

From the start, the research teams followed a participatory approach, with the involvement of project supervisors and the team of experts.

The first methodology paper on the study was presented in Marrakech in the wake of the *Regional Conference on the Political Empowerment of Women in the MENA Region in Light of the Current Transformations* in early May 2014. This was followed by an initial,

20. Alain Blanchet, *L'enquête et ses méthodes, l'entretien*, Paris, Nathan, 1992.

two-day workshop in early September to discuss the proposed methodology and agree on a common work plan. The results of the prospective phase and interview instrument tryouts were also exchanged.

A third workshop, in early May, included the presentation and discussion of the general context in each of the four countries, together with the literature reviews and the subsequent stages of the study. This was followed by the presentation and discussion of first drafts of the national reports, prior to preparing them in the final version, in a fourth workshop held at the end of June.

This synthesis report is the culmination of all the above stages and efforts. It summarizes the main results of the national reports and establishes links between them, highlighting points of conversion and diversion between the four countries and leading up to recommendations that would, on the one hand, support the advocacy project Oxfam is planning to launch so as to consolidate women's participation in political life, and on the other, enable CAWTAR to remain faithful to its commitment to set future courses of action to benefit Arab women in the region and help meet the current challenges they face.

Key concepts

- **The notions of poverty and marginalization**

Attempts to determine a sociological meaning for marginalization have diverged, but they have converged on tying it to the notion exclusion, which is more common. In fact, marginalization is difficult to define specifically because it is related to various situations such as poverty, deprivation, lack of qualifications and denial of social engagement. This indecision shows the sociologists' uncertainty before a truth that is difficult to capture. Marginalization is not limited to economic vulnerability, the decline of recruitment levels or the lack of resources, but goes beyond that to include the decline in enjoying social rights and exercising them as guaranteed by the legislation.

• Levels of marginalization and its causes

The levels and aspects of marginalization vary from one region to another according to each region's demographic structure, economic and development situation and the extent to which its job market is open or shrinking. Additional factors include the nature of the development policies and how responsive they are to the different constituencies' needs. Marginalization is also intimately linked to the culture of the marginalized group in the region, and this is manifested in:

1. A diminished sense of initiative
2. The prevalence of a dependency and welfare culture

• Characteristics of marginalization

Marginalization is characterized by the number of mechanisms that produce it and the mix of personal and institutional constraints which contribute to its production or reproduction. Marginalization is defined in this study as a concept tied to poverty so that it does not include other marginalized categories of women, such as single mothers, female politicians who are barred from leading positions in their parties, etc. In his 1991 book entitled *Social disqualification: An essay on new poverty*⁽²¹⁾, Serge Paugam emphasizes three types of poverty which he defines as follows:

- Integrative poverty, when there is a large number of poor people who are easy to recognize among the population, as in developed countries;
- Marginal poverty, which is a different manifestation of poverty involving a small group of people who fall victim to accidents in life;
- Disqualifying poverty, when the poor increase in number and are concentrated outside the production sectors.

The third type of poverty is a concept that has a procedural academic value in this study. But if we could manipulate the production sectors to include the spaces for participation and for initiatives of transformative action, then we would see the organic relationship between poverty and marginalization: Poverty limits the individual's capacities to participate in public life and, thus, society reacts in a way that confirms this loss of these capacities.

21. Paugam, S, *La disqualification sociale, essai sur la nouvelle pauvreté*, Paris, PUF, 1991.

- **The notion of participation**

Participation in public life is a right and duty and, as a rational activity, it relies on leadership as a strategy and a means, rather than an objective. Participation requires qualifications and incentives which are bound to bring symbolic participation, for instance, to the level of actual participation.

- **Levels of participation**

- Access to information
- Expressing one's opinion
- Taking the initiative
- Voting

Participation may take different forms; it may be formal or informal. Formal participation refers to all types of direct membership in civic or political institutions, such as associations, trade unions, parties, organizations and so forth, while unofficial or informal participation, be it legal or illegal, refers to sit-ins, demonstrations as well as other means of protest.

Participation, according to Marie Helene Bacqué and Mohamed Mechmeche⁽²²⁾, in a 2013 report, refers to the capacity to act and is tied to women's political empowerment. It is this notion which guarantees the move from non-participation to participation by emphasizing the sources of "power in women and developing them."

In our study, however, the focus is on the capacity to act, which stems from the individual's awareness, her will and effort to reach objectives beyond the individual level in order to serve a public interest that benefits the community, which is, in our view, a national, non-ethnic community, thus highlighting the social and political, rather than cultural, dimension.

Focusing on women's participation specifically, we use cases that show that this participation remains very limited, compared to the men's participation, and fraught with difficulties and obstacles, especially for women living in poor and marginalized situations.

22. Bacqué, M.H ; Mechmache, M, Pour une réforme radicale de la politique de la ville. Ministère de la ville, juillet 2013.

The notion of transformative leadership

As the label indicates, transformative leadership is one that focuses on effecting a social change. The initial definition of this concept is of great importance and gives priority to the transformative nature of leadership, which allows us to break with traditional leadership frameworks. Transformation includes various levels—economic, social and political.

The key word in defining transformative leadership is change, since this leadership stands on the will to change and aims to effect change. Therefore, our understanding of transformative leadership is at odds with the monolithic view; it is not about having everything or nothing, but about the issue of changing the sociological view of participation and the various paths women may choose to exercise their influence on public policy and on decision makers, directly or indirectly.

Hence, the first step in capacity building, in this regard, is to focus on the experiences of women who have actually transited from the margin to a significant civic and political participation and to bring them to light, for leverage and inspiration, in order to support similar and potential experiences and attempts.

Part I

Obstacles to women's participation in civic and political life

Section 1. Poor and marginalized women: The trio of initial obstacles and how they are related

Field work in the selected areas in the four countries has shown the close relationship between one's local belonging, economic situation and educational level. In what we called the marginal areas, which lack economic and social capabilities, resources and advantages, women, like most other inhabitants, lack sufficient resources to meet their needs. This leads girls to drop out of school and to take low-wage jobs, for some of them.

Thus, belonging to a marginalized region with a high poverty rate and a lack of institutions and job opportunities exacerbates already difficult economic situations in a way that greatly impacts the girls' education, leading them not to have the educational qualifications and diplomas required for job opportunities which would guarantee them a margin of financial autonomy.

Leaving school has indeed stood out as major obstacle to all that would promote the girls' autonomy and build their capacities to be interested and involved in political and civic life. The sample included a large number of women who expressed their awareness of the importance of education and the negative impact of dropping out of school.

Naama, one of the informants, said in this regard: "I regret nothing in this world except my education. Education is everything. It is what lets anyone understand and move forward" (Naama, 46, 1st grade, not married, unemployed, Al-halfa, Beni Khair, Nabeul, Tunisia). Mayada adds: "I left school a little girl because we used to go to the village to pick up dates under the palm trees, collect wood and herd sheep" (Mayada, 41, 8th grade, divorced, civil servant, Hadramaut, Yemen). In many cases, women in Yemen said illiteracy was the main obstacle they were facing in Hadramaut and Hadida.

In The occupied Palestinian territory, the range of obstacles characteristic of marginalized areas are compounded by the occupation factor which reduces the girl's chances to pursue their education, as in the case of Amel who said: "After I got married, my husband and mother in law encouraged me to pursue my education, but it was not easy to commute to school from where we lived and my fear of commuting was the main reason why I shied away from the idea of education. As you can see, the village of Prophet Samuel is in Section C, settlers control the entry point to the village where a family of settlers on the outskirts of the village and they are the ones who cause trouble and unrest for the inhabitants of the village, in addition to Israeli police control of what goes into the village, such as food supplies and work materials" (Amel, 25, secondary school, married, housewife, Prophet Samuel, Jerusalem, The occupied Palestinian territory).

Despite this specificity, a number of cases in The occupied Palestinian territory resemble cases in the other countries where poverty causes school leaving or not having an education altogether, as illustrated in Nour's testimony: "I live in dire economic circumstances and poverty is not shameful. What is shameful is that you live in a disrespectful environment, an environment of dope, drugs and empty gazing. I attended college for two years and for family reasons I had to leave and work as cleaner in a clinic..." (Nour, 39, sophomore, married, unemployed, Hekr Al-Jamaa, Dir Al- Balah, The occupied Palestinian territory); or Salam's testimony: "I never went to school. My father used to let me gather animal feed and bring water. I took a literacy course for two months and then my father stopped me to look after the animals" (Salam, 23, illiterate, married, unemployed, Al-Birka, Dir Al- Balah, The occupied Palestinian territory).

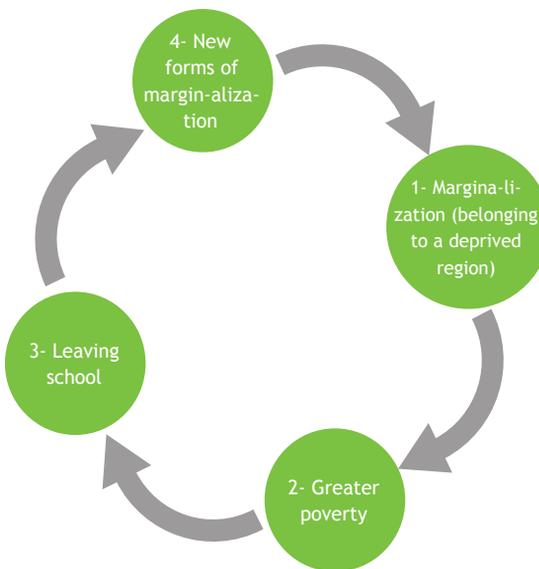
In the case studies, poverty had a local dimension and was intertwined with specific conditions and situations characterizing the regions that lacked opportunities to improve one's living conditions, particularly in rural areas and villages. However, in the regions enjoying economic and social advantages, these specific socio-economic difficulties are specific to women coming from other areas as part of the job-seeking, exodus movement between regions.

Hence, poverty constitutes a process that starts from belonging to a deprived area, which exacerbates the economic conditions to the extent that it forces girls to drop out school and thus cancel job opportunities that would guarantee them financial independence This creates new forms of exclusion by denying these girls any

professional qualifications or skills, excluding them from the job market, depriving them of opportunities to build relationships with colleagues and achieve social integration and eventually barring them from developing personal qualities, self-confidence and social interactional skills.

This underscores the notion of disqualifying poverty, according to Serge Paugam⁽²³⁾, which subsequently undermines the individual's professional, developmental, social and personal qualifications, causing the loss of one's civic specificity, which is the essential basis of a society. For society is not the sum of individuals in it, but the relationships, networking, communication and interaction between them. The graph, below, illustrates how one is caught in the marginalizing process.

Precariousness of social and economic conditions



23. Paugam, s, La disqualification sociale. Essai sur la nouvelle pauvreté, Paris, PUF, 1993

- **Obstacles according to women: Is gender first or marginal as an obstacle?**

The notion of situated or locally-related poverty, together with the difficult geographical features and the lack of what urban areas have in terms of development facilities, institutions and associations, soon reveals its femininity, if we carefully consider the informants' testimony. Poverty and vulnerability, though related to local communities, are more specific and pronounced in the ranks of females. For the school-leaving phenomenon does not concern females and males equally. The field study has shown that whenever family situations required sacrifices, it was always the girls who made such sacrifices and took the responsibility of health and home care, while the role of males was restricted to providing financial means to the extent possible.

This principle is echoed in all four countries, as illustrated by the example of Amina who was deprived of pursuing her education, which had required her to commute to the city and caused her father to oppose that and say: "I don't have daughters who go to Teboursouk!" (Amina, 50, divorced, Hotel worker, Merezga, Nabeul, Tunisia).

The same was noted in The occupied Palestinian territory, with Noha saying: "at age 13 that was it, I left school. I made up my mind so that my mom would not stoop to anyone, just like that, with my father being ill. There was no need for Mom to go begging. I would stay home and work, knead the dough, cook, bake bread and feed my brothers and sisters" (Noha, 36, Basic school, housewife, Salfit, The occupied Palestinian territory). Mayada says in the same vein, "I left school because we used to go the village to pick up dates under the palm trees, collect wood and herd sheep" (Mayada, 41, 8th grade, divorced, civil servant, Hadramaut, Yemen). Wided also says: "My family is close-minded. Even school, I didn't go to; girls in their eyes are only good for marriage. They used to tell me 'girls are like rotten lemons'" (Wided, 35, 6th grade, married, laborer, Hadida, Yemen). Considering a girl "a rotten lemon" is a reference to the representations which make early marriage the most appropriate solution to avoid more damage, as if the birth of a daughter brings along the birth of societal fear of smearing the family's honor such that marrying the girl off at an early age has become the norm in Yemen, where a rural culture

prevails, seeing women in a functional role and denying her one of the most basic and important rights, namely education. The case of Wided is even more expressive in this regard, as she says: “we were five girls and two boys. The boys went to school and we didn’t, because Dad was a day laborer and couldn’t afford to send everyone to school” (Wided, 35, 6th grade, married, laborer, Hadida, Yemen).

The field study in Morocco has shown that women, though the main providers for their families, are not socially recognized for the roles they play. Instead, masculine cultural constraints limit their action to the private sphere, which leaves out even the possibility of thinking about competing with men in their activities in the public sphere.

Given these considerations, we may conclude that poverty, sex and marginalization are primary obstacles which work together and can hardly be separated or ordered, even though sex remains the determiner of the marginalization process. Poverty engenders marginalization, but it also results from it, while sex engenders both. Therefore, if a woman is poor, then that is her ticket to a process of marginalization and poverty which constitutes a vicious circle that is hard to break, especially in the absence of civil society organizations involved in women’s political and economic empowerment in rural, village and semi-urban areas.

While investigating the impact of the situations presented above on the informants’ themselves and on their interest in public affairs and politics in their countries, we analyzed their discourse in terms of self-expression and in relation to politics. The next section will cover the results of this aspect of the study.

Section 2. Indirect obstacles

- **The informants' ability to express themselves**

Self-introduction proved to be a tough test for many of the women informants. It was also very confusing and embarrassing. The reactions ranged from smiling to surprise to cryptic answers. This meant that the informants were not used to being paid attention to or to being asked more than basic identification questions. One of them said: "What am I? At home, taking care of my old mother" (Naama, 46, 1st grade, not married, unemployed, Beni Khair, Nabeul, Tunisia). In the same disapproving style, another said: "Cleaner, uneducated, what would I be?" (Wided, 35, 6th grade, married, laborer, Hadida, Yemen).

Such expressions may reflect the low self-esteem and self-exclusion that some poor and vulnerable women would apply to themselves, which reinforces the social marginalization they experience; however, other informants felt more comfortable answering the question to introduce themselves by relying on their ordered view of their roles in the family and at work, particularly in the case of women with intermediate of advance level of education. This, in fact, shows the relationship between the ability to express oneself, among other abilities, one's educational capital and experience as a woman in the public realm and in political participation. For instance, the women with membership in associations were fully competent to express themselves when talking about their own lives or about public affairs.

As Alex Mucielli put it, the individual asked to introduce himself would necessarily situate himself in a given context so that this context would be "emotional family-related," "professional" or "sociopolitical," and the latter was only encountered in the interviews when the investigator took the initiative to indicate it.

This shows that the macro-social and civic (citizenship) dimensions have not yet become part of daily life, or been integrated in the way of thinking and interacting, which raises the issue of social upbringing and schooling as key institutions that are supposed to nurture one's sense of citizenship through a carefully designed and effective pedagogical approach.

However, secondary upbringing, which individuals receive in the course of their lives as professionals, spouses, party and association members, etc., allows for redressing the neglect of the civic, citizen dimension, as indicated in the discourse of the women involved in public and political affairs when compared to those who were unable, or found it difficult, to introduce themselves and talk about their role in society.

- **Discourse mechanisms for developing a perspective on political and social affairs**

The way the informants in the four countries expressed their views on political affairs may be described in terms of the following categories:

- Inability to discuss any topic involving politics
- Refusal to talk about politics
- Repetition of the prevailing, ready-made comments and prejudices
- Expressing a structured, well-justified position and a perspective on political affairs

The first category concerns the women who excused themselves or admitted their inability to answer, such as Naama who said: "I say anything, I'm afraid I may say something that turns out to be wrong" (Naama, 46, 1st grade, not married, unemployed, Beni Khair, Nabeul, Tunisia), or Wided who said: "Illiterate, I don't understand politics or anything else" (Wided, 35, 6th grade, married, laborer, Hadida, Yemen). Likewise for some women from Morocco, such as Karima who said: "I don't know what to tell you" (Karima, 50, illiterate, married, housewife, Alnif, Morocco).

These views are those of women who are basically unschooled, illiterate or having a very low level of education who lack the ability to understand the events or workings in political and civic life, which denies them the possibility to even dare say anything about the subject. The second category comprises women who clearly expressed their lack of interest in politics, giving different excuses the most prominent and common being poverty. This is illustrated in what Fatima said: "Why should we discuss politics? Those

involved in it are well-off, don't need anything. Whatever they want, there'll be someone to get it for them [...] nothing. A woman living with her husband, doing fine, whatever she wants he'll bring her. She wouldn't know the cost of oil or sugar or tea or clothes or the feast or anything else. She has no idea how much it is. She just cooks for her children and works" (Fatima, 41, illiterate, divorced, owner of popular coffee shop, Alnif, Morocco); or in Aicha's words: "Politics is of no interest to me because I only have my good health, if I work I eat, I and my children, and the day I don't work we stay hungry" (Aicha, 52, 5th grade, married, house worker, Nabeul, Tunisia).

The discourse on poverty as a key obstacle to being interested in politics in the poorer areas becomes even harsher, as in Meknes, Morocco, with Rania saying the following in relation to her lack of interest in the general situation in her country: "I have no interest in this matter. When I think about myself just sitting with you and think about what I'll have to do for lunch tomorrow, what we'll have for dinner, how we'll get dinner and what I'll give them for dinner..." (Rania, 28, Baccalaureate, married, street seller, Jawareb, Meknes, Morocco).

It is worth noting that the first signs of disconnect between poor marginalized women and politics appears at the level of discourse, since this category of women just refused to discuss this topic, even in a superficial, general and spontaneous way. They justified this by what they considered their first priority, namely to secure food and provide the essential needs for themselves and their families. Thus, the poverty they were contending with as self-evident and fateful made politics and any interest in it a "luxury" reserved of those who had enough to eat, when poverty should be seen in the sociopolitical context resulting from the specific focus on the women's condition in this context.

As for the third category, it included women who expressed relative disinterest in discussing politics and sometimes tried to voice their opinions, but in doing so reproduced ready-made statements on politics and politicians, reflecting either a lack of trust in decision makers and state institutions or lack of purpose in being interested and taking part in political life.

This lack of purpose reached the level of sensing the "futility" of taking part in public demonstrations or actions, in the eyes of informants such as Meys who said: "I mean the

last march, the last march against rising prices and the high cost of living, we walked and walked and, by God, no one was listening, nothing, I just felt that we had released some tension" (Meys, 41, secondary education, married, works at home, Jemaain, Salfit, The occupied Palestinian territory).

Note that some of the informants showed readiness to be interested in public affairs and take part in political life if they had the financial means, skills and time necessary, as expressed by Monia, for instance, in answer to the question on the main obstacles to her civic participation: "Money and shyness, these are the factors that prevent me from moving forward" (Monia, 27, illiterate, unemployed, single, Beni Khiair, Nabeul, Tunisia), or Noha who said: "the time when I want to go out there I want for my kids not to be lacking anything at home, so that I may be free to teach them [help them with their homework]. So the time when I want to go out there I'd rather spent at home and be done" (Noha, 36, Basic school, married, housewife, Salfit, The occupied Palestinian territory).

This last statement brings forth again the issue of the roles assigned to women on the social scene, which makes all opportunities open to males while putting hurdles for females. For some women only value themselves in terms how well they perform the traditional roles which are generally limited to childbearing, home care and tutoring the children, which does not leave them any time or energy, sometimes, to play other roles. The statement also highlights the negative image of female politicians, as seen by some of the informants, which makes them more accepting of the social stereotypes that exaggerate the differences between men and women, thus, making men the somewhat "natural proxies" to lead, to rule and to work on all that concerns society and politics. A number of women actually talked about the "emotional nature" of women, which keeps them in a weaker position and makes them unable to make tough decisions in critical situations. This characteristic is contrasted with a "masculine nature," with opposite attributes such as rationality, boldness and toughness. The discourse on a masculine or feminine "nature" explains part of what makes the representation of the differences between the sexes hard to change because it ignores the social nurturing of such differences.

The fourth category involves a number of women who expressed an analytical, critical reading of political trends in their countries, thus revealing broad knowledge of developments and their relation to historical events. These women have the ability to

fathom and diagnose the data available and take coherent, rational positions.

These women believe that being interested in politics and participation in civic life is an obligation and say they are aware that it is tied to their reality and to the future of their children. There was a variety of descriptions of the situations from one country to the other. In The occupied Palestinian territory, for instance, talk of the colonization predominated over other topics, while there was a dearth of analyses and comments built on positions regarding the situation in Yemen and on the duty of women to participate intensively in order to have an impact. As for Morocco, the discourse of some of the informants was full of analyses and proposed solutions in a style that showed variable abilities to express one's views and elaborate on them as well as to use the appropriate political jargon in common use. This was basically due to the variable educational levels and experience in civil society and politics.

Hashouma said: "The first thing, first, we need to resort to in Morocco is to achieve social justice; we need to work hard, not just go on TV, the mass media, to show them what we will do. What we will is something that has to be done, to materialize on the ground: social justice, providing equal opportunities for all, not just for those who have connections, who get a helping hand, as we say, to reach everything in Morocco, while the large majority of the people suffer from the lack of opportunities." Hashouma adds, attempting to define politics: "For me politics is the ability to run the social, and economic affairs of the country, and the material; that is, to serve the public interest, for the citizen" (Hashouma, 54, married, university graduate, retired, manager of a tutoring school, Rabat, Morocco).

These categories of women's positions regarding politics reveal a dialectical relationship between what may be called "civic, political skills," which are clear at the level of discourse, and participation in civic life. These skills, as well as the ability to speak in public, consolidate civic and political participation while participation, at the same time, develops these skills and hones them.

- **Expressive abilities and the acquisition of qualifications for political and civic participation**

Among the human abilities to help establish personal autonomy, Paul Ricoeur⁽²⁴⁾ distinguishes between language and the ability to act in order to emphasize the cultural and historical forms that result in the inability to express oneself, which he considers a basic source of exclusion from the community. This argument brings to mind academic research which deals with unequal opportunities for the sexes in terms of the right to self-expression and the domination of masculine discourse in political meetings and the media, in addition to social inequality, which eventually excludes poor and marginalized groups from the “dialogue process,”⁽²⁵⁾ especially in politics, a domain socially perceived as wholly masculine. This led Daniel Gaxie to argue that democracy presupposes that each citizen should have the ability to appreciate the challenges of the political domain and its symbolism; however, this ability is not equally distributed among all actors. Gaxie explains that social inequality undermines the ability to understand public matters (la chose publique)⁽²⁶⁾, which leads to the division of society into two categories: those specialized in politics, on the one hand, and those watching or not caring, on the other, who lack the ability to assess events and systems, and the capacity to appreciate political skills and strive to acquire them. Among such skills, this study focuses on having the ability to understand the semiotics of the civic and political domain in order to be able to monitor reality, evaluate it and express one’s views on matters concerning the community. Bourdieu states, in this regard, that “being interested in politics means having the authority to speak politically about political issues.”

Having established that poverty, the lack of education and of a political upbringing, which ensures an individual’s acquisition of the ways and means to ease integration into a civic community, constitute major obstacles for women, in particular, to participate in political and civic life, it is necessary to situate these women in their relational environment in order to explore the factors that exacerbate the above obstacles or overcome in the women’s immediate context.

24. Ricoeur, P, *Le juste* 2, Paris, Edition Esprit, 2001, p 89.

25. Zimmerman, PH, *Genre, langage et conversation*, *Rezeaux* , 2000, 18, pp 183-201.

26. Gaxie, D, *Le cens caché, inégalités culturelles et ségrégation politique*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 3ème édition, 1993

Part II

The relational system and the importance of the relational approach

Section 1. Role of the initial upbringing unit in shaping a girl's profile

The study has shown the ongoing central role of the family in determining and shaping the individual profiles of the women interviewed, even though some of them said that they had planned their own lives. However, their detailed talk about the key stages in their lives, such as education, work and marriage, revealed that they acted according to their families' wishes, be they explicit or implicit, either by force or, on the contrary, to achieve a match between the girls' individual behavior and the families' expectations, which maintained integration in the first relational unit. This conclusion highlights the importance of transfer (transmission) in shaping individual orientations, behavior patterns and representations, including those relating to social roles and to the political domain and the differences between the sexes.

Upbringing follows a dual process: indoctrination and influence, on the one hand, and vulnerability and internalization, on the other. The second relates to the extent to which the individuals comply with the process of heritage transfer so that they adopt the representations in their fathers' words, ideas and positions, which shape their behavior and actions. The field study has shown the importance of internalization in understanding the analogy between the stereotypes held and described by a large number of women from the four countries. Such stereotypes basically reflect the prevailing masculine mindset propagating on the fundamental difference between the sexes.

In this regard, Touda said: "Men will be men and women will be women. That's been the case since the world was created, the higher position always goes to men and if wives intervened in something, [they'd do it] carefully, but men always have priority. I'd say if a woman wanted to say something, she would have to speak like a man, so she gets much attention" (Touda, 43, 4th grade, married, seamstress, Alnif, Morocco. Hadil, from Yemen,

thought the same when she was the one who prevented her daughters from pursuing their education, thus recreating the same experiences she had lived herself (Hadil, 35, married, illiterate, cleaner, Hadramaut, Yemen).

The various internalized social representations of women and men lead to excluding the former from politics. This was clear in the speech of a number of women in the sample, such as Nour who said: "By God, I think the role of a woman is to raise children. What does she want with politics? Leave it for men so she can fulfill her primary mission: look after her children" (Nour, 39, university graduate, married, unemployed, Hakr El-Jamaa, Dir Al-Balah, The occupied Palestinian territory).

Even those who supported women's participation in political and civic life expressed some reservations about the position a woman would when involved in politics, such as Afifa who thought that women were «sentimental by nature and this doesn't make them suitable for the position of President, for example» (Afifa, 39, B.A. in Management, Omda (local mayor), widow, Beni Khiar, Nabeul, Tunisia). Nour expressed the same views as she said: «A woman in the position of Minister!, I'm not convinced a woman can change anything as she doesn't believe in her capacities. I see her better in a position of interaction with people and not in a position of power. Men have more potential to rule than women, even though I have never met a woman in political parties or in decision-making positions» (Nour, 25, secondary school level, married, Ennabi Samuel, Jerusalem, The occupied Palestinian territory).

However, note that there are women who speak positively of women and their capacities and readiness to compete with men. Also, social upbringing is not linear and limited to the family context, but involves other structures like school and youth peer networks. Anne Muxel says: «The heritage we receive through the process of social upbringing always remains a matter of give and take».⁽²⁷⁾

What is, therefore, the extent of family influence on the informants' choices as determined by their dependence on others for decisions affecting their lives? This question leads us from thinking about internalized ideas and images to declared family interference and control of the girls' profiles.

27. Muxel, A, *Avoir 20ans en politique*, Paris, seuil, 2010, p58

Section 2. Systematic reference to others to explain or justify adopted or imposed choices

Family relations, as seen in light of the informants' testimony, seem to be somewhat governed by the logic of the fatherly or patriarchal family. Indeed, there were several examples of families where the patriarchal role was played by the eldest brother in case the father was dead, sick or incapacitated. Such authority may also be exercised by the uncle, aunt or even the mother, sometimes.

Thus, we may conclude that many families in Arab countries are still ruled according to a pyramidal relational structure, with the father, or a male proxy, at the top. The mother may also replace the father as the authority, since this position can never be left vacant, while the children, girls especially, are in the bottom..

The father's authority can be seen at the level of the decisions shaping a girl's life, most importantly in relation to dropping out of school, being devoted to caring for the parents or husband, getting married or working to help meet basic needs. As far as making an educational choice, Hanan said: "I wanted to be a decoration engineer, but my mother told me that I would get married, so there was no need to study engineering. Therefore, I studied English translation" (Hanan, 23, married, university graduate, housewife, Sanaa, Yemen). Likewise, Amal said: "Financial management and banking, that's the specialty area I wanted, but because of customs and traditions my father made me study sociology because after graduation I'd work in a bank, meaning that I'd have to contact with men mostly, and this is right in our society." (Amal, 29, university graduate, single, active in the field of social work, Hadramaut, Yemen).

Family authoritarianism is then replaced by that of the husband, who sometimes makes sure to leave his wife in a position of economic dependence, thus objecting to her going out to work and even preventing her from looking for any means to earn the smallest amount of money. This was the case of Sana who said: "I was looking for any way to earn money to spend on my son and get whatever I want. First, I brought a rabbit, it had baby rabbits and there were many rabbits, when he saw my project was growing he asked me to get rid of them or else he'd throw them away. He wants no good for me; he has no

mercy, nor does he let God's mercy come" (Sana, 39, M.A., single, laborer, Dir Al-Balah, The occupied Palestinian territory).

Opposition to women's employment is echoed in the experiences of other women like Aziza who said: "He tells me, do not work, just stay home (...). They don't like it. For them rurals, women should not work; they should see no one but their children, just stay home." (Aziza, 35, illiterate, married, saleswoman, Rabat, Morocco).

"Customs and traditions" have proven to have overwhelming influence on mentalities, thus forming an important resistance factor against a series of changes that should not be overlooked. The four country reports have shown that earning an income has become, in many cases, one of the roles assigned to women, regardless of whether the husband had a job or not. For instance, Hadil said: "My husband accepts that I work because life is very tough. He is too old and sick, so I had to go back to work. Now, I'm providing for the family; I'm in charge" (Hadil, 35, married, illiterate, cleaner, Hadramaut, Yemen).

In addition to allowing women to work, it is also worth noting that there were cases in all four countries where women were granted the freedom to manage the family budget, either to shed this difficult responsibility or as a kind of compensation for women who abandon the desire or need to work outside the home.

Some of the informants talked about a participatory method in making family decisions, in addition to particular cases where the father was presented as the opposite of an authoritarian figure. While Hadil spoke about the violence she had suffered at her father's hands: "You know, my father used to hit me whenever my aunt told him to straighten his daughter out" (Hadil, 35, illiterate, married, cleaner, Hadramaut, Yemen), Bochra reported a smooth relationship with her father: "I preferred to get married rather than continue my studies. My father, God bless his soul, did not force us to get married or leave school, never. He would let you decide for yourself" (Bochra, 33, 9th grade, married, seamstress, Rabat, Morocco).

These findings taken together, allow us to detect signs of change in marital and family relations. However, like any social change, this bears within it some resistance which feeds on customs, traditions and established mindsets.

Section3. significance and impact of inequitable power distribution

The unequal distribution of power within the family in the four countries generally paves the way for inflating male authority on the basis of various argumentative references stemming from a misinterpretation of religion, as seen in Yemen and The occupied Palestinian territory, a conservative rural culture, the primacy of social customs, and the duty of protection imposed by the “state of weakness” which is characteristic of women according to the logic of “custodianship.” There is a long list of motivations for justifying and maintaining male domination, leading to a various manifestations of this domination at the symbolic, linguistic and physical levels.

Speaking about men, Raba said: “Tyrants with women. If I cook beans, I can’t put sauce on them. When he comes back home, only then will he do the shopping, because if I ask him in the morning, he would shout and I can’t stand it.... Our son, when he was one, his father would say: ‘Call your mother donkey... bitch...’ I was upset...” (Raba, 28, Middle school, unemployed, Salfit, The occupied Palestinian territory).

Authoritarianism turns into a kind of violence that is acceptable in the family since it serves to establish “the superior male ego;” which, while growing stronger, gives further assurance of the power to defend the family honor and reputation, which females may spoil. Besma, one of the informants, recollects these words from a song that her mother used to sing: “She who bears a boy, deserves a basin of honey, deserve a cart load of ‘henne’, deserves a place in heaven, while she who bears a girl, deserves searing with fire, deserves a spot in the back of the house” (Besma, 59, university graduate, married, retired school teacher, married, Beni Khiar, Nabeul, Tunisia). Besma added that her eldest brother used to order her to keep quiet when she was not talking. He would also forbid her from watching television and order her around with the approval of their mother.

Several other women talked about the physical violence they suffer from, such as Nour who said talking about her husband: “I’m damned if he takes a bath and I don’t wash his clothes right away! No one can imagine what I get, all the neighbors would hear me

screaming. One time he pulled my hair so hard I couldn't sort it out or comb it" (Nour, 39, university graduate, married, unemployed, Dir Al-Balah, The occupied Palestinian territory).

This case, like others, proves that violence that many women in Arab societies are subjected takes many shapes and forms and proves that the road ahead in terms of implementing women's rights and finding an appropriate rational model for achieving gender equality is longer than that already covered and that legal progress is necessarily accompanied by an improvement in representations and mentalities. Though intervention at the level of the social psyche and heritage may be a long-term project, attempting to shake their precepts and reformulate them constitute an absolute necessity, or rather, an emergency.

Despite the apparent imbalance in power relations between men and women and all the forms of family domination and poverty, some women are actually trying to make their voice heard and to assert themselves as effective actors. They have found in their state of marginalization, injustice and subjugation incentives to push them forward and irreversibly, to participate in civic life and join the national community. These women show such enthusiasm for change through the use of various plans and strategies which will be developed in another section, below, following the part dealing with the manifestations of change that some women have already achieved, or are still trying, and the obstacles they are facing, together with the factors facilitating access to the civic and/or political participation phase.

Part III

Ways to overcome the obstacles

Section 1. Manifestations of civic and political participation

The variable level of education of the women in the sample was reflected in their participation in civic and political life and in its quality. It was clear that those who had a secondary or university education achieved a more effective participation while the participation of women with low levels of education was restricted to informal personal initiatives in collaboration with associations or without. However, this participation remained limited in numbers compared to the official participation described above. It was clear, then, that education was a crucial factor in orienting individual profiles toward participation in civic and political action.

In the beginning, the study aimed at identifying the women participating in civic and political life outside the association and party framework, but this framework proved to be a necessary crossing point toward participation in most of the cases studied and was probably the necessary link between participation and commitment. If participation had a punctual or occasional character, commitment would have to be continuous and lasting.

Participation was of two types, formal and informal, and involved different levels, as demonstrated by field research. Participation ranged from symbolic, through interest in public and political matters, to cooperative, through volunteering to take part in initiatives that called for collaboration with state institutions and the relevant administrators, to effective participation by taking part in a political or association activity to put pressure on, and influence, decision-makers through gaining access to strategic positions.

This analysis shows that participation may take various, numerous forms, as summarized the following activities undertaken by the women involved in the study:

- Organizing sensitization workshops and meetings or doing free awareness-raising work.
- Education and fighting against illiteracy

- Vocational education and training (especially for school dropouts)
- Supporting small business projects
- Organizing local demonstrations
- Striving to realize local reforms to improve infrastructure and housing at all levels in the region.

These forms of participations had a different impact on the regions where the women came from in terms of magnitude and location. This included mainly:

- Acquiring social recognition which led progressively to changing the view on women and valuing their capacities. A craftswoman reported her family's and neighbors' opinion of her saying: "An ideal woman who represents the city. She represents craftsmanship and we are proud of her. Frankly, there are people who would hoist me high over their heads" (Soumaya, 57, basic school, married, craftswoman, Meknes, Morocco).
- Making women's work acceptable and gaining the support of men in contexts of the strongest opposition to it. Fatma proudly described her experience in a conservative male environment saying: "There was never a woman to run a café and keep it this long. I was the first woman to open a café, you see. This was unacceptable to them. The first woman here in this market was me" (Fatma, 41, single, runs a popular café, Alnif, Morocco).
- Improving women's economic and social living conditions.
- Developing infrastructure and equipment (for example, building a bridge and a drainage system over Oued Merazka in Nabeul, supplying a mountain area with electricity and running water, refurbishing a school in the area of Halfa).
- Decline in the early marriage trend in the districts of Zriba and Sakhna in Yemen.
- Women starting an education, trying to change things at the level of their families and changing their views on women's issues.
- Putting an end to the geographical and social isolation of some marginalized areas; for example, the efforts made by the Rural Youth

Development Association at Ghardaya in the Governorate of Nabeul, Tunisia, to work with children and young people, in particular, and try to sensitize them about citizenship principles.

- The massive participation of already sensitized women in elections. This is what Salma noted as a result of her efforts to sensitize women who were mostly disinterested (Salma, 27, B.Sc. in computer science, single, active with an association, Gabes, Tunisia).

Note that the changes made were mainly based on two approaches: volunteering and advocacy. Volunteering presumed the principle of freedom and choice as well as the principle of free service and action in the public interest. As for advocacy, it presumed an awareness of the importance of social action, hence mobilizing the community to defend a common cause.

The emergence of particular women as standard bearers of social and political causes raises the question of the extent to which their roles are recognized by men, in particular, and society at large. This will be the focus of the next section.

Section 2. Men's attitudes towards women's on female transformative leadership

The study in the four Arab countries allows for articulating the collected views of men around two main positions: encouragement, recognition and acceptance on the one hand, and opposition, competition and resistance, on the other. Next to some irresolute positions, expressing reservations about women playing key roles in the civic and political realm, limiting their horizons, or considering them “novice politicians” and, therefore, unqualified for participation, just like men (Kamel, 45, judge, Nabeul, Tunisia), there were positions that recognized the importance of women and their ability to play leadership roles in society and to manage and effect change.

This indicated some openness to, and support for, women's participation, but with immutable narrative representations of “the feminine, emotional, reactive nature” of women, depicting them as “tomboyish” whenever they deserved the attributes of strength and competence. Hassen said while talking about “successful” women: “Those are the ones we call man-like, women who act like men are man-like, “tarkazit,” in Tamazight (Hassen, 32, 9th grade, hairdresser, Alnif, Morocco).

This comparison is based on a dual or binary thinking framework (*catégorie de pensée binaire*)⁽²⁸⁾, which refers to a cognitive process that makes us see things, assimilate and categorize them through division, separation, opposition and contrast between representations, objects and concepts.

Hence, the individual may either be a woman, on the weak, sentimental and soft side of the spectrum, or a man, on the tough, strong and rational side. A woman who has the characteristics of a man, therefore, becomes “man-like,” which places her in the second category, closer to being a male.

Françoise Héritier considers this dual categorization as the basis for all other categorizations and the driver of the social order and division of roles and social space, in line with what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “category of opposites,” where

28. Françoise Héritier, *Masculin-Féminin I. La Pensée de la différence*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1996 ; rééd. 2002.

rational logical thought is opposed to emotion, and knowledge to instinct, bearing in mind that the former characteristics apply to men while the former apply to women. This obviously results in segregation between them in the sciences, for instance, as well as in politics and civic action.

In sum, what is key in this intellectual arsenal based on opposition and binary categorization is that it is part of the unseen in social thinking (*impensé social*), which gives to all the classifications based on it an obvious, or rather, natural character.

Even though the men in our sample ascribed weak participation to women's lack of qualifications to take leadership positions and their sentimental nature, we need to look into the obstacles meeting these women as actors with influence on public or political life. This will be analyzed later following the identification of the factors that facilitated and promoted the emergence of women in the area of citizenship activity.

Section 3. Supporting Factors in the implementing of women's participation in civic and political life

In addition to education, the importance of which we have often highlighted throughout this study, there are several personal, social and institutional factors that encourage and promote women's participation and involvement in civic and political life.

- **Personal factors**

Self-confidence is the main factor to reinforce a woman's will and motives to participate in effecting change. This is common to the four countries.

- **Social factors**

Social recognition is first in a series of social factors that promote women's participation. It represents an implicit challenge for every woman as she takes an official position or plays a role regarded as "masculine."

With respect to social recognition, some of the interviewees talked about the support they had from their families or husbands. Nozha said: "My husband told me to go for elections. That's how I ran to the elections in 1997. He encouraged me" (Nozha, 54, baccalaureate level, married, retired, Marrakech, Morocco).

Family support may also be conveyed through other channels, such as the received models transferred via inter-generational relations, especially those including a positive image of the mother which the girl tries, i.e. that of a strong, educated and successful woman.

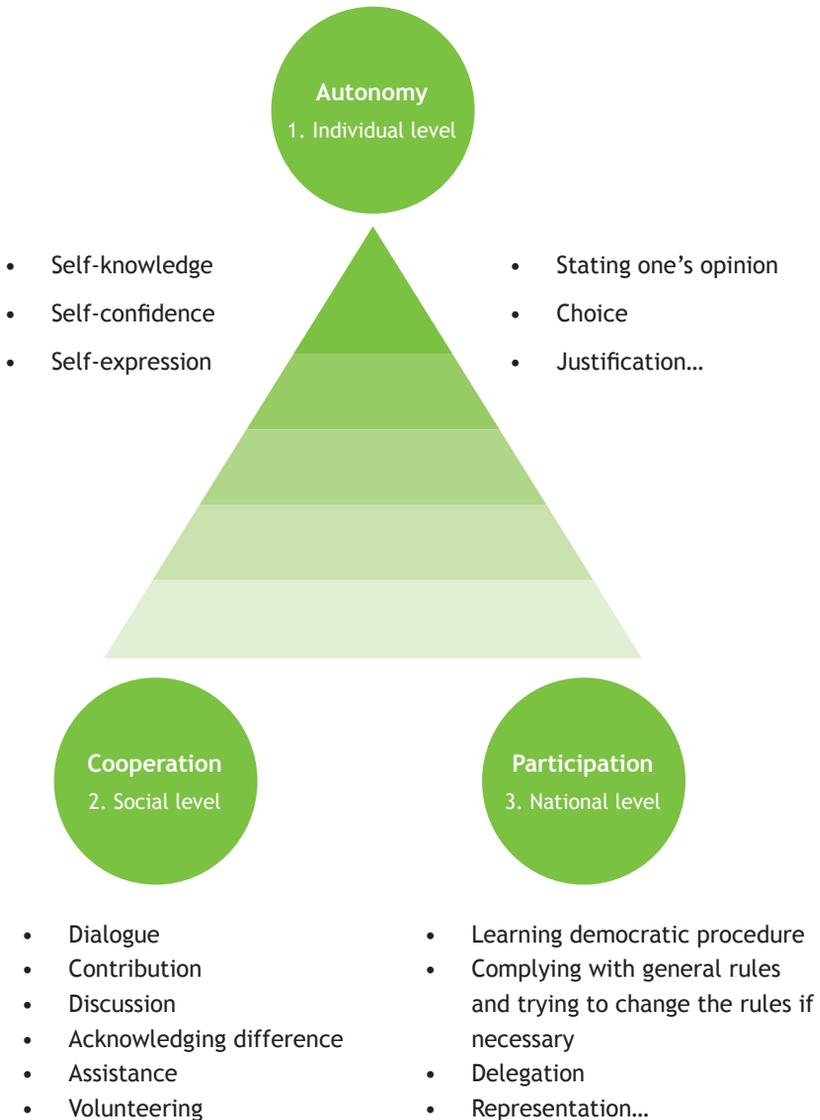
- **The role of associations, civil society and institutions**

Most of the women in the sample appreciated the central role of the training sessions they had attended in determining their orientation toward greater awareness of the value of civic participation. Furthermore, the associations and specialized bodies active in the area of women's economic and political empowerment represented a context for a secondary upbringing, as an alternative to a primary social upbringing which lacked a civic education totally different from political education. Membership and active practice in civil society activities also seemed like a necessary step to link the personal and interpersonal domains and political participation, eventually.

With self-confidence and autonomy, the individual's ability to open up to the community, to communicate, discuss and acquire other social attributes is reinforced and, thus, civic participation is achieved, mainly through interaction between the private personal and social spaces within a civic value-laden framework. In many cases, this leads to moving from social volunteering to political participation.

There is, therefore, a process which highlights the importance of starting by boosting incentives and capacities on the personal level (by means of social initiation in the family and at school), then at the social level (through pedagogical programs and training sessions, in associations and civil society institutions, in particular). This would be followed by developing skills for civic participation in the context of political education (to be assigned to civil society organizations and structures active in political empowerment).

It should be noted that this political education cannot be separated from the preceding phases. It actually acquires its full meaning in the intertwining of the personal and interpersonal levels and what it requires in terms complete adoption of civic values to prevent differences from being a conduit for conflict, social exclusion or self-exclusion and, hence, social and political isolation. Transiting from the stage of non-participation to participation starts from strengthening personal autonomy, to reach the stage of social cooperation and, then, participation in civic and political life, with all that these stages require in terms of competencies, as shown in the figure below.



Section 4. The obstacles women are facing

Foremost among the difficulties that women in leadership roles face are material ones, and these constituted a common factor for the informants in this study, whether those active on an individual basis or in coordination with association, or the activists in political parties or associations.

The masculine mentality was second among the common factors in the four countries and an obstacle for women who excelled as effective actors in their local or national communities. The impact of this mentality is even stronger in relation to women's participation since it propagates internalized ideas about the supremacy of men, their physical force and psychological power which make them more qualified to handle "difficult" missions and positions, while trying to maintain the traditional social distribution of roles.

In this context, Nozha from Morocco said: "Men have a complex towards women. They would say, even in the elections, women want to compete with us, what can they do for us?" (Nozha, 54, baccalaureate level, married, retired, Marrakech, Morocco). She adds in the same vein: "They tell you, what? Couldn't find a man to vote for a woman! They'll be laugh at you. They'd say, we know women are competent and they work hard, but we couldn't vote for a woman when there are male candidates." (Nozha, 54, baccalaureate level, retired, Marrakech, Morocco).

The opposition of Men and society at large to women broadens based on a mindset driven by of sex discrimination and translates into oppression against them, thus preventing them from traveling as part of their civic activities, under the pretext that they should not mix with men or travel without a male relative, as was experienced by some interviewees from Palestine and Yemen. Such opposing stances may reach the point of restricting women's feminine activities, be they economic, civic or political.

Speaking about the harassment she met when she opened her popular café, Fatima said: "When I opened this café, they set fire to it, they set it on fire. They were after me, they robbed me, they broke the doors, I got electricity, they cut it off on me, and if I stay around, they'd hit me with stones at me" (Fatma, 41, illiterate, divorced, has a popular café, Alnif, Morocco).

When it comes to some women holding high administration positions, some men may accept women and see them succeed, but only to a point (a tolerance threshold). The case of Fattoum illustrates this as she says: "I was appointed as a district deputy director. My husband said no way. He contacted the director and told him, 'there shouldn't be any position for her. That's it, she stays home. Put her name down for the position and she stays home and doesn't go to work.' I am not used to staying at home. When my new office was ready and everything was set, I was up early, my husband asked, 'where I was going? I told him, 'I am going to the office.' He said, 'Haram (God forbids it)), you're divorced if you leave the house and go to the office.' I said 'O.K., I don't mind; I consider myself divorced.' He was shouting as I opened the door, went out, stopped the bus and got on" (Fattoum, 39, university graduate, married, deputy director, Hadida, Yemen).

The issue of husbands blocking their wives' way to social mobility was raised as such upward mobility would enable them to develop skills that allow for civic and political participation. This was the case of other women in the sample who had played transformative leadership roles after leaving their husbands or by resorting to a step-by-step strategy and applying it progressively. This represents critical situations experienced by divorced or unmarried women who are obliged to achieve their autonomy, which is the open way to participation and commitment.

There were other examples in our data to illustrate the opposite of the negative impact of husbands who, on the contrary, backed their wives because they realized how positive their roles were on their wives' mental health and life in general. These attitudes relate to the family model which is undergoing important transformations, though slowly, as they give greater consideration to the psychological side and to self-growth in the framework of what François De Singly⁽²⁹⁾ calls the "relational family." One of the interviewees said in this regard: "My husband tells me to do whatever I want; the important thing is that you have fun. He wants to see me beaming (épanouie), and he doesn't pressure me" (Amel, baccalaureate level, married, runs a shop, Nabeul, Tunisia).

29. De Singly, F, *Sociologie de la famille contemporaine*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005, p 91.

As with material obstacles and the prevailing male domination mentality, the lack of social recognition was one of the obstacles common to almost all informants who felt it negatively affected performance. Note that men's opposition to, or dislike of, women's participation concerned only the political realm while their involvement in associations or charities was more acceptable.

In this regard, Fattoum said: "You find men who are educated, in top-level positions, but when they see a woman reaching a decision-making level or in a decision-making position, the first to oppose her are these educated men, before the illiterate. I mean, there'd be strong opposition, a big problem" (Fattoum, 39, university graduate, married, deputy director general, Hadida, Yemen).

Such attitudes unveil a contrast, as it appears from the interviewed women's experiences that educated men and involved in politics, in particular, are the most opposed to women occupying top positions and gaining access to decision-making posts. Thus, women's participation in political life is not equivalent their participation in civic life, despite the tiny difference between them. Besides, political participation is much less accessible to women than some people may think.

Further to the obstacles women face when they go out to the public realm and participate in social, civic or political life, their role as home makers and child raisers and tutors remains unchanged. We do not mean by this change swapping roles between men and women, but thinking about creating good circumstances for a new life style involving more sharing and role alternation. This issue does not concern the spouses alone, but needs to be tackled in terms of taking measures concerning working hours, motherhood and fatherhood leaves and taking into account "family time" in the determination of professional roles and obligations and work plans.

Finally, let us consider the issue of political party affiliation, which has hindered women's efforts to implement specific reforms at the local level, which is an obstacle all the women in our sample have faced in all four countries. Party affiliation opens the door for conflict with those belonging to opposing or enemy parties. One of the interviewees talked about "party priorities" which may suppress concern about the public interest. This led her favor going back to activism in civil society, which was

more compatible with her desire and interests and allowed her to intervene, put pressure and effect change to a greater extent than possible through her position as a member of parliament, as she put it (Nada, 48, university graduate, married, MP, Nabeul, Tunisia).

Given all these difficulties surrounding civic participation, the question arises about the strategies adopted by women to overcome them. This will be addressed in the following section.

Section 5. Strategies to overcome the obstacles

The strategies adopted by women give us an idea about how they order the obstacles they encounter in their activities. The difficulty of dealing with the masculine mentality and with social norms, customs and traditions came first in The occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen, in particular. These strategies were mainly as follows:

- Acquiring communication techniques: Among these, persuasion and listening, accepting criticism, not rushing to decisions, etc. Women in The occupied Palestinian territory, for instance, adopted face-to-face communication with other women in home visits, instead of formal invitations to encourage them to attend meetings, and this was done to counter reticence and rejection from women and society at large.
- Relying on the avoidance technique with regard to customs and traditions; that is, by avoiding criticizing or questioning them. This reflects the amount of difficulty female leaders face, making them go along with social norms while compromising on the grassroots nature of change, adopting a progressive approach, working for the long term and not raising expectations too high to avoid total rejection. It is, therefore, more cogent to speak about an option, rather than a strategy, since women participating in civic or political life in The occupied Palestinian territory or Yemen face serious restrictions from men or from the environment, sometimes subjecting them to violence. This leads them, as in The occupied Palestinian territory, to prioritize working for the general public interest over particular women's needs.
- Trying to find sponsors or backers: Concerning financial difficulties, active women in The occupied Palestinian territory have recourse to networking with foreign associations and organizations.
- Working on the common priorities of the community as a whole, since what characterizes the Palestinian context, as often mentioned in the national report, is the Israeli occupation which contributed to the "politicization" of women, as one informant put it: "We, Palestinian women have been under occupation for 60 years..., it's not up to you, you have be a politician, you can't" (Khouloud, 48, M.A., married, agricultural engineer, Jerusalem, The occupied Palestinian territory). Hence, covert action and attempts to deceive and mislead Israeli soldiers constitute work for the benefit of the local community benefit and was a major part of women's activity. Such activity alone has primacy and full social legitimacy

As for Tunisia and Morocco, the strategies adopted by leading women reflect the existence of a more appropriate environment for civic and political action which is guaranteed by laws that are evolving to further consolidate women's rights, despite the persistence of many obstacles related to social inequality at the economic and gender-relations level.

Concerning Tunisia, the study helped to identify four key strategies:

- Attending training events and courses, which may be understood as practicing participation pedagogy. This presents actually applies to most of the countries in the study.
- Turning obstacles into incentives: The decision to effect change and create opportunities, instead of constraints, starting from an extreme social situation is what we may call participation as an adventure, where women would sacrifice everything in order to gain everything, which requires a great deal of boldness. In such cases, women actually benefit from favorable historical, economic or political circumstances. We may find evidence for that in the case of Afifa, a widow, university graduate, and the mother of two children. Before the revolution, she lived in very difficult material circumstances until the old regime collapsed and the former community representative (Omda) left his post to a few competing men. Afifa was the one woman who found strength in her social and economic vulnerability and ran as a candidate for this position which her village community considered a "male position" involving interaction with men, mostly.
- Engaging in civil society activism with the means available to break with negativity and the lack of civic and political life. Participation in this context is considered as a rite of passage as it represents a critical step in an individual's life, which Valérie Lafont calls "the sliding moment"⁽³⁰⁾ once it has been cleansed of its negative meaning. The sliding moment makes people who are very remote from any participation or engagement accept membership in association or party structures under the influence of some societal or biographical factors or events as well as relationships.

30. Lafont, V, « Les jeunes militants du front national, trois modèles d'engagement et de cheminement » in *Revue Française de sciences politiques*, 2001, p 16.

- Working within the space available in one's job context or by establishing or joining associations on the basis of a project aimed at solving a problem or difficult situation that women have encountered at some stage of their lives. This is called compensatory participation. Anne Maxell says in this regard: "Social wounds may lead people to involvement,"⁽³¹⁾ thus making the experience of exclusion, marginalization and injustice itself a motive for women to overcome it through civic and political participation in the context of a "personal, therapeutic and symbolic experience," to borrow Bernard Lahire's words.⁽³²⁾

The case of Sonia illustrates this process. She engaged in associational, then political action, then, in October 2011, she ran for a seat in the National Constitutional Assembly, following her divorce from a man who used to beat her and caused her a mental illness so that she lost custody of her children and gave up their home to him. Thus, the associational and political experience was a way for her to break with a previous discouraging phase and move on to a new phase that helped her rebuild herself. Sonia said: **"I have a dream of seeing the mentalities and prevailing local culture change. Most people do not have a goal in life, or an objective of some sort. I wanted to go back to the old Sonia, who vanished in me and was completely forgotten, the brave, ambitious Sonia before I got married and then divorced"** (Sonia, 45, 1st year at university, divorced, civil servant, Jendouba, Tunisia).

In Morocco, the study identified two strategies that involve particular considerations worth looking at. These strategies were:

- Accommodating and adapting to social rules (social bricolage), which is what some women do to take advantage of the small margin of freedom granted to them by society to mitigate its hostility (towards divorcees, brave or emancipated women, for instance) and its fears (from unmarried women who are active in a masculine environment). As shown through the field study, this involved resorting to decisions related to divorce, choosing the "appropriate" husband (who would not be against the woman's ambitions), or adopting a girl so as to be accepted by the community as a mother, because motherhood could replace the compulsory social character of marriage.⁽³³⁾

31. Muxel, A, *La formation des choix politiques dans le temps de la jeunesse : filiation et expérimentation*, Paris, CNRS, p72.

32. Lahire, B, *Portraits sociologiques*, Paris, Nathan, 2002, p. 67.

33. The case of Fatma, 41, runs a popular coffee shop, Alnif, Morocco.

- Achieving financial autonomy as the first priority and as a way to personal autonomy. Many women in the Moroccan sample resorted to the following strategies to do this:
 - - o Taking a loan
 - o Borrowing from associations
 - o Learning particular crafts
 - o Taking small jobs
 - o Starting small projects and recruiting women from the neighborhood

Based on the experiences and the case studies, we can see that the transformation women wanted to bring about in Morocco affected women's economic condition in the first place, bearing in mind that financial autonomy represented the way to civic participation, as in the case of Nawal (49, baccalaureate level, divorced, assistant record keeper, Meknes, Morocco), who decided to create the association Feminist Solidarity, following an exhibition she organized with a loan from the municipality to sell her products.

Thus, change in Morocco had an economic character in most of the case studied, which allows for determining an episodic transformation, as in the case of Fatma who worked as a house cleaner, then in a café where she was exploited and robbed of her wages. After that, she went back to Alnif to open a popular café and run it in a hostile social environment. The analysis showed this to be a course of action meant to effect a change at the individual level as well as the level of reaction with the local community through «an economic channel».

This was also the case of Nawal who bought a sewing machine after her divorce and started traveling to various areas to teach illiterate adults for very low wages, until her project grew along with her circle of connections. She, then, created the Feminist Solidarity association, established in her home, and continued teaching women, sensitizing them and helping them to improve their economic conditions. Her association was selected for financial support from the commission of the Women's Representation Support Fund. Nawal's case illustrates how she engaged in a process of economic empowerment which soon turned into a social project aimed at improving poor women's situations.

In Tunisia, transformation was preeminently focused on the civic dimension, on political participation and women's condition, which made it possible to explore the characteristics of a multi-dimensional transformation. In contrast, the transformative roles in The occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen revolved around the social and/or political aspect, without the possibility to focus on the situation of women as a target group, mainly, in the transformative project. Thus, there was only partial transformation.

Talking about her efforts to avoid conflict with her community, Nadia said: "Traditions and customs are the first things we think that, a little, I mean, the community and the margin (the surrounding area) you're looking at, they talk, or something, we thank Allah, we avoid such things, and if we do some work, we do it right to prove to others that we are moving forward, doing the right thing". (Nadia, 58, Baccalaureate level, divorced, active in social work, Hadramaut, Yemen).

The analysis in The occupied Palestinian territory also demonstrated that social norms, traditions and customs were "a red line" not to be crossed and that necessity required the inclusion of any work targeting women in the effort to serve the local public interest so that it would not be met with absolute resistance and rejection. Samira said: "They had no awareness; when I opened the nursery school and started organizing meetings for women, they would let their children throw stones at me... Who is this woman wanting to change things?" (Samira, 62, M.A., heads an association, Dir al-Balah, The occupied Palestinian territory).

Summary of results: Defining transformative leadership

The report was based on deconstruction and reconstruction. Deconstruction concerned social culture, which, like all the other obstacles, hindered women's participation in civic and political life. It also concerned avoiding the exaggeration of the role of poverty to such a point that it would become impossible to notice ways of participation outside the appropriate contexts. As for reconstruction, it relied on the relation between the different milestones of the study; this is, discovering what is possible starting from situations that some might judge as extreme, making impossible to break the circle of marginalization and move to the stage of action, contribution and participation.

Determining the various *obstacles* and analyzing them was followed by a study of the *manifestations of participation* among women. Likewise, the analysis of the *difficulties* that these women had faced was followed by the detection and reading of the *strategies they used to overcome* the obstacles, thus highlighting the meaning of "the duality of deconstruction and reconstruction" in the pairs: obstacles/participation and difficulties/strategies.

The transformative actions discovered started from marginalized social, economic and structural situations to become a transformative, compensatory, reformist and/or transitional operation that came as an individual initiative which only acquired a meaning when it was integrated in a transformative project. Such a project went beyond the personal level to try to have an impact on the community so that it would own it or go along with it. Meanwhile, the woman championing this project produced a positive image of herself and her ability to preserve this image in the local community.

The transformative projects for some of the informants confronted a male culture and a system of social norms which were hard to break through and which increased the differences between the samples studied in The occupied Palestinian territory and Yemen, on the one hand, and Morocco and Tunisia, on the other. These differences were ascribed to the legislative gap between what could be called the two poles of the study. However, the gap between the legislation and the reality of women's participation within the same country should not be overlooked. This calls for changing legislative achievements into

empowering achievements, not through pyramidal, top-down empowerment, but by reconsidering the concept of citizenship, so that it includes “normal citizenship,” the concept of participation, so as to situate it in a pluralistic perspective, and the concept of *leadership*, which does not refer to a particular status or role in the community, but embodies the ability to manage the elements of exclusion and transforming them into incentives and elements of integration, which is the procedural meaning of the notion of transformative leadership.

The merit of this study is that it has broken with the stereotypical representation of leadership, even though it has benefited from the knowledge base relating to women’s participation in political and civic life and from the guide to reading the symbols of gender segregation imbedded in social models; that is, because the stamp of leadership is defined according to its motives and goals.

This shows that the concept, in addition to being comprehensive, is dynamic, developmental and evolving, based on the interpretation of the individual experiences. This made it unwieldy for the national research teams because, time and time again, it was so difficult for the individual researcher to leave behind his own perspective which would, to some extent, influence his elaboration of the concept at the level of method, especially in determining the research sample, and at the level of formulating a definition of transformative leadership in line with the outcomes of the study.

Conclusion

This study fits within the category of studies that combine investigation and experimentation to raise questions on an issue which is, by and large, a development crisis, and in its specifics, a matter of segregation on the basis of sex, and of exclusion and marginalization of a particular category of women in Arab societies. In light of the rapid changes in the region since the start of the so-called Arab Spring, the situation of women and their status has stood out as an issue for competing agendas over women's rights and obligations, on the one hand, and cultural, political, social and economic obstacles, on the other.

A quick look at this situation would suggest that it is hanging between the course of events and the cultural tenets. However, this study has chosen to monitor the dynamic situation in the most difficult contexts, i.e. in the ranks of poor and marginalized women in order to shed light on experiences that would refute the hasty judgment asserting the absence of any connection between these women and political and civic life.

The analysis of field data has shown that, in some of the poorest areas, a group of women were actually able to overcome the obstacles hindering their participation in civic and political life. Segregation on the basis of sex turned out to be the first of several intersecting and combined obstacles that widened the gap between women and the realm of civic action, together with illiteracy, dropping out of school, unemployment or taking low-wage jobs, which leave these women in a process of marginalization. The study has also uncovered indirect obstacles, including the perception of women as inferior, the dominance of attitudes based on gender discrimination, and the belief that women lack what it takes to understand what is going on in the public realm and in the political sphere. This was particularly clear in the informants' discourse, given that several of them failed present themselves at the beginning of the interviews, or to evaluate their roles. They were unable to express their views on the general situation or the political events in the country. This was, to a large extent, due to weak sense of belonging to the community, as a result of their low self-esteem and failure to achieve the required level of autonomy.

This situation was reinforced in some of these women as a result of the social upbringing in their family context, which showed evidence of fatherly, or general family, oppression of girls, sometimes turning into various levels of violence, be it symbolic, verbal or physical.

However, these obstacles did not prevent a number of women from taking hold of their destiny and rising against the vulnerable situations crushing them by relying on various strategies according to the type and size of the hardships imposed on them by the social environment in each country.

Accordingly, in the occupied Palestinian territory as well as in Yemen, traditions and customs appear to be a red line not to get near. This led women to focus on developing personal capacities in the individuals who were active with them, giving more attention to communication techniques and adapting them to interaction requirements within the community. The occupied Palestinian territory was the only country that had women working side by side with men in their struggle against Israeli occupation, which stood out as an important factor in women's "politicization" in the country.

In Tunisia, the study allowed for the identification of examples of women who were active in associations, parties, or outside the formal participation framework, but within a general project fully aimed at changing women's situation for the better in the region. In Morocco, the economic dimension prevailed over all the others, which confirmed the notion of progressive and step-by-step process according to which women would go out to the public realm, then to the job market, and from there to civic and political participation. This has proven to be a reliable way towards political empowerment, even though the examples investigated showed that it was related to civic participation, in particular.

Last but not least, the results of the study allow for detecting the elements of a transformative leadership that a group of women were actually able to exercise, even though they were limited in number. Still, what is most important is the emergence of valuable experiences in unique individual profiles, but which are so representative that they could be used as lessons in terms of transforming the marginalization and

exclusion experience into one of participation and engagement. Hence, the essence of transformative leadership is that it originates from a totally inadequate economic and social environment, without any trace of a social or political upbringing leading to the development of a sense of citizenship and incentives to reach the participation stage.

Transformative leadership is what raises us towards the realm of the possible starting from the will to change through the design of efforts and plans to change for the sake of effecting change. On this basis, it becomes clear that transformation is the key word to introduce transformative leadership, not as a definitive term, but most importantly as an academic as well as practical project that opens up new horizons and venues.

Recommendations

To governments

- Address school dropout rates, particularly among girls, and tackle all obstacles in the marginalized areas by means of:
 - Providing support to poor and marginalized families,
 - Adopting social policies that support poor families and providing the necessary care to the disabled,
 - Provide secure means of transportation.
- Intensify literacy programs in rural marginalized areas
- Find mechanisms to support women's economic empowerment in rural and marginalized areas.
- Ensure equal pay for men and women.
- Facilitate and establish women's and development associations close to isolated and marginalized areas which target poor women's integration.
- Pass and enforce laws against all forms of segregation and violence against women.

To civil society

- Involve men in training workshops on women's rights and gender.
- Organize roundtable discussions with women in areas lacking social and economic facilities, starting with everyday concerns and leading up to political issues, and help them to make the link between the private and public realms.
- Provide assistance to start small projects through cooperatives.
- Involve women in discussions of projects and finding solutions to their local problems.
- Organize training sessions and workshops to build women's capacities to communicate (self-respect, expression, taking a position, making decisions, etc.) and take a stand on an issue they would call for and defend.

- Provide logistical and financial support to women in leadership positions at the local level who are able to manage economic projects.
- Work with religious leaders to develop a religious discourse that supports women in enjoying their full human and universal rights.
- Organize awareness raising campaigns on the importance of women's participation in civic and political life.
- Eradicate legislative illiteracy.

To the media

- Promote positive, non-stereotypical images of women and value their success stories.
- Publicize models of non-traditional women leaders for people to know about their experiences and benefit from them.

To research centers institutions, international organizations and support structures

- Develop research on transformative leadership and diversify the countries in order to identify additional experiences and compare them with the ones already studied.
- Promote and publicize the concept of transformative leadership.

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Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Biography

Biography of Manel (Morocco)

Manel is a member of the city council, aged 49 with two daughters: the eldest from her first marriage is 24, and the youngest from her second marriage is 13. Manel dropped out school at the baccalaureate level to get married to a man with a good economic situation. Nevertheless, she was quickly widowed when her daughter was still an infant. She married a crook who wasted everything she inherited from her first husband, finally found herself homeless, and lost other revenues that she inherited from her husband. At that moment, Manel decided to take her destiny in hand and reconstruct her economic situation starting from scratch through hard work and perseverance. Manel will not only meet the need challenge but will also create projects to empower other poor women. Her success will lead her later to political participation as presented her candidature at the city council and became representative; then she resumed her studies to specialize in sociology. The case of Nasal shows that, to operate change, Nasal relied on economic activity to move to political and civic activity.

Childhood

Manel was born and brought up in a conservative family according to what she says where she received a religious and military education as her father worked in the army and he was very severe with his ten children (5 boys and 5 girls), he imbued them with fear and fright. He made all the decisions in the family.

Despite the father's severity and ruthlessness, he treated Manel in a special way compared to her brothers and sisters. She was the favorite in the family because she was calm, modest and timid, which created problems with her sisters who were jealous of her and despised her: « But not with the girls, they had good relationships between themselves, they slept in the same room. As to me, I was different from them; they were not simple like me ».

Dropping out of school to get married

At the baccalaureate, Manel dropped out school and got married to a teacher to flee family suffocating atmosphere: « My father was very firm and severe with us, as we very much feared him. This is why I decided to leave school and get married to get rid of that ». She bore a daughter and then her husband died, and left her with properties and good revenues so that she could afford a respectable life to her daughter and herself. Then, she felt the weight of isolation while she was still young and she decided to get married a second time. However, her second marriage was a failure as her husband was a crook and he showed another image of himself just to marry her and then take all her heritage from her deceased husband. This experience affected Manel very much and led her to commit many suicide attempts.

Manel succeeded to get divorced from the husband who used all the forms of physical and symbolic violence. It is this divorce, according to Manel, that will give her strength to face hardships and problems; « My second marriage changed me into a strong woman, able to face all shocks and hardships».

Falling into poverty

Manel found herself homeless and without any possessions because of her second husband who used his cunning against her. She fell into poverty and need while she used to provide financial support to her family, brothers, and sisters.

Hence, to cover the rentals and her family basic needs she took a loan from a small financial institution to buy a sewing machine. She became a tailor at home and she would travel long distances on foot to teach women sewing for small remunerations: « I would travel to seven sources (surroundings of Meknes) on foot and teach women to get 1500 Dirham a month and then come back home at 12 and resume work ». Following this, she worked as a trainer in a social center for teaching women sewing and dress design.

Starting civic activity

While she was working as a trainer in the women professional training center, Manel decided to create an association that she called « Women Solidarity ». The main reason for starting this association, according to her, was the hard conditions she suffered besides the hardships facing divorced women and widows. She reserved a room in the house she rented for teaching women so that they could rely on themselves and improve their economic situations.

This first experience in associational work made her decide to start political activity to reinforce her personality as she says. She became persuaded with this idea after watching a program on television about a woman leader who chairs a Human Rights Association. This Human Rights activist was saying on television in the program: « Women who want to reinforce their personality should start associational and political activity ».

Reactions of the social environment

Manel met support and encouragement from her neighbors, and she became a model in her district: « Most people and neighbors encouraged me and would say they want to see me better. We are proud of you ». She also gained support from local authorities, as some of the authority representatives confirmed to her: « If we had just 10 women like you, our city would be quite prosperous ». Manel appeared in a television program. She also had her products exhibited for sale at the municipality and made a lot of profit.

This made her well known and helped her to participate in the local elections and take a seat as a representative.

However, Manel's brothers and sisters objected to her political activity. They asked her to give up this activity because, according to them, it was an immoral work:

« This is a dirty job; it is a job for immoral people ». Manel faced many problems caused by existing rival associations, which she fought with different means, and by competing political parties.

Manel's achievements

Despite the hard conditions and the negative experiences that Manel had to face, she was able to overcome them with hard work, struggle and perseverance and she succeeded to save her family from poverty and delinquency and cover her two daughters' school expenses.

Her ambition did not stop there but she resumed her studies after a 28 years' break as she is convinced that political participation calls for a good education level. According to her, a politician should be knowledgeable about his society as well as other societies « I have to be educated and have a diploma and a good background ». Now, she is at first level at the university (sociology department). Manel met a lot of encouragement, especially from her youngest daughter who is proud of her and boasts in front of her friends: « She opened her eyes and found her mother at university level with a political activity; she's proud of me in front of her friends and tells them that I am a student ».

Manel's job as an elected representative opened many opportunities in front of her. She tried to bring changes inside her family « If I was not active in this area, many problems wouldn't have been resolved and opportunities like my daughter, she is specializing in tourism now », and in our city, she helps the inhabitants and facilitates their access to hospitals, administrations and courts.

Manel created, in collaboration with the National Initiative for Human Resources Development, a center for teaching to eradicate illiteracy among women and teach them sewing and dress design in order to create independent economic opportunities through money-earning activities. She did not stop there but she opened an office in the municipality where she would meet men and women once a week for two hours to listen to them and help them resolve their problems.

Manel looks ahead to becoming a representative at the level of the region, reach Parliament, and become a Minister. Manel attended many training sessions and seminars within the Maghreb countries and elsewhere and this helped her to build wide national as well as international relations. Lately, her association has been selected among five other associations by "Women Representativeness Support Commission", created by the Home Office to promote and support women accessing public and political life.

Obstacles within political work

The obstacles and problems that Manel meets now in her civic and political work are men's refusal to co-operate with her to start projects; this led to disturbances with her activities and pressure on her: « There are men who could not do that. I think that no one can reconcile associational and political work. And all this besides being responsible for the center and raising children ».

Furthermore, some of the obstacles meeting Manel refer to her low financial means, which limit her ambitions. Hence, she decided to start work with a regular income. Therefore, she took a job as an assistant to an archivist from the family, to whom she provides her network of relations to facilitate his work with his clients.

Accordingly, the experience of Manel gives us an example of career in which economic participation motivates political participation, taking positions related to civic affairs and looking forward to positions at the national level. Manel's record was a reproduction of traditional roles as mother and housewife. However, her two marriage experiences and economic ruin pushed her to get involved into a process of economic self-empowerment, which will turn into a social project to develop poor women. This change will bear fruit by her access to the political arena and dealing with public affairs.

Biography of Fatma (Morocco)

Fatma underwent a series of events that presented important milestones in her life as we can see from the interview. Fatma was born in a poor family in the countryside, she got married at an early age to meet her father's will but she divorced later. She got married twice after that, but both marriages ended with divorce. Fatma also knew homelessness and begging at Alnif, which is somewhat an urban area, and during this period of her life she discovered that she could work or help others (families/individuals) against a financial gain or other.

Therefore, she started a job as house cleaner or 'assisting others'. These activities were the start of her access to the sector of services (cafés, restaurants). She left Alnif to look for a job in the same sector. After many years of work in a café, one of the owners of a cafés exploited her and refused to pay her, this made her go back to the small town near her home village. She started a popular café and was able to realize a transformation with an economic and social scope at the personal and general levels.

The life of Fatma revealed to us records in which transformation management activities are possible through work within an environment where poverty and male domination reign. The following paragraphs will provide a description and analysis of Fatima's life in terms of its relation to our study.

A deprived childhood

Fatma was born in a village, in the region of Alnif, in a family with three brothers and two sisters. Fatma thinks that she received a good education from her father: « Our parents gave us a good education; our family gave us a good education ». In spite of this, she did not go to school because the community did not allow girls to have an education, according to what she says. She wanted to go to school but local social order did not grant her this right: « At that time, girls did not go to school, it's immoral ». In addition, this gives an idea about Fatima's childhood who did not have the opportunity to experience school. The reason why she did not go to school could be explained by the family's lack of financial means as well.

Fatma had a difficult childhood, characterized with deprivation and segregation between girls and boys within the family, even though she talks about the good education she received from her parents. This explains her negative look to that period of her life, particularly relating to the values organizing gender relations. At that time, women would not go to the market: « No, we could not go even to the market ».

The same thing applies to school as we saw. Contrary to boys, girls did not have an education, which is a right: «All my brothers went to school, but not the girls, it was immoral at that time for girls to go to school».

What Fatma tells about her childhood helps us to imagine her conditions of life then, and which participated in building her life later. Her deprivation of school motivates her but gives her a feeling of bitterness. This is not encouraging to participate openly in a political activity.

Recourse to early marriage

Fatma underwent crucial events in her life. She was married despite her will under the family pressure with a 43-year-old man while she was twelve: «Oh! My family obliged me to marry him. I was 12 and he was 45». The age difference between them accelerated divorce.

Fatma got married and divorced three times: « I married three men, I divorced them all, until the age of 17, I paid the price ». From what she says, marriage appears to be a limited-benefit business. As in the second marriage, divorce was announced before marriage rituals took place because the bridegroom lied to her, as he told her he belonged to a noble Moroccan family 'The Mourabitin'. But she discovered that he had other more modest origins 'Kabyle' (with dark skins) and this marriage is not convenient to her as she is from nobler origins:

«The second husband did not consume the marriage, we only made the contract, I went with him and came back in the same day, I left early in the morning and came back at about 4 in the afternoon. We are noble and he has dark skin (like you), when I arrived at his house, I discovered he had dark skin and he told me he was from a

noble family (the Mourabitin) In Autumn, they gather all the flies, they are dirty, don't wash, I fled». This second marriage was Fatima's own choice: «No, I did want to marry him, he was a school teacher, he told me he wanted to marry me and I said yes, and he asked my hand from my family».

As to the third marriage, it was with her cousin, it was a love marriage and with her will: «He was my cousin. He wanted to marry me and I accepted». However, after some time of common life, conflict and disagreement started.

The husband was very violent with her, he had many friends who came to the house and stayed late, and this made her lament and try to find the real problem: «I married him but he did not try to establish good relations between us, or was it me? We stayed together 10 years until I divorced by law, this was not fatality; he used to get drunk and beat me. Oh, I did not allow him to do that. Men coming to the house, spending the night drinking, I did not accept that, and I ran away, he refused to divorce until I got divorced by law. I asked him to divorce but he refused". She stayed with him, until the law, organizing family relations was reformed and helped her to get rid of her conditions of life with the husband and put an end to this marriage. She used her right to ask divorce and obtained a positive result. Repeated divorces do not mean that she refused marriage, but this is due to the behavior of the men she lived with.

Homelessness, begging and starting work in the services sector

Throughout the entire interview, Fatma was telling about her hardships. One of the most important stops in her life was her father's death, which caused the disintegration of the whole family so that every member of the family took his own way: « Until my father died and we separated, my father died in 1996, everyone took a way, we became isolated from one another, and I became solitary, I went on my way working in cafés and hotels, I worked as a maid as well ».

At this stage precisely Fatma was obliged to go out and make her life within the unknown, she left the village in search for a job, she went to Alnif and she spent a period of homelessness and begging there, where she lived from what the merchants

in the market gave her, and she slept in one of the corners of the market : « Sometimes, I slept in the market at Alnif, yes, I slept here in the market, I slept in the market and asked butchers and vegetable sellers to give me something and I went to cook it in a corner in the market».

During the period of homeless and poverty, she started working as house cleaner with some families for some money at Alnif.

This job as a house cleaner, despite its ungrateful character, was the starting point towards economic independence, together with other factors like working in cafés and restaurants and later in hotels. Throughout her travel from one job to another, she was finally able to identify methods and ways of getting jobs and progressing. She says about her start in the services sector: «The reason that made me beg in the market is that I have never been to the market before, I couldn't imagine another kind of jobs. Even when I started working as a house cleaner with families, the people would ask me to go and work for them. Then I went to work in a hotel, I worked in Ouerzazat, Ennadhour, I worked. In the beginning I begged, I was tired of begging, I went to work in cafés».

The period Fatma spent at Alnif was a stage of discovery before starting to do paid jobs and heading towards financial independence. Therefore, work means earning an income to meet one's needs. However, the various jobs presented opportunities to improve her capacities relating to communication, management and responsibility and understanding people's conduct in society. She changed from a homeless beggar to a worker in a café and sometimes manager; all this proves personal capacities within Fatma.

Achieving financial independence

Fatma spent a long time travelling for work from one place to another all over the country. This allowed her to experience many situations and know many areas, and this enriched her experience in this sector. However, it is improbable to have a permanent job due to the weak structure. Fatma worked for a café owner who exploited her and refused to pay her. This experience led Fatma to make a crucial decision in her life, it is to go back to Alnif, the starting point (Alnif center), and

settle there. We can call this period a comeback to operate the radical change. When she was tired of going from one place to another, she could not find a person to pity her except the passengers of a bus on a daily line at Alnif, she says about that: «I was tired of working as a maid, I went to work for someone, and he didn't pay me for 3 months. I worked with him at the café, he did not pay me, he exploited me, I came back and I was penniless. From Ennadhour, the bus driver took me without paying ».

Fatima's pessimism regarding work for other people created inside her a strong desire to get rid of dependence on others by working for them. She understood that dignity could be preserved only through owning one's own project that guarantees a stable and independent situation. Therefore, she rented a café, which she will buy later and she succeeded to take a small loan: «I made a decision and I took a loan from a micro-credit institution, I bought a few tables and chairs, a gas cooker, some plates, when I bought all that, I thank my God, I will work and reimburse them 11 thousand a month (70 dollars) ».

What Fatma has accomplished is not negligible given the nature of the community where male segregating values dominate. Firstly, she established her café in the market – it is a place exclusively for men. In addition to - and it is not a good thing for women - opening a café she offered sex services discretely, this activity is forbidden by the Law and by society, all the more that Fatma is from this region. Women who want to practice sex professions must go to places where no one knows them. However, Fatima's situation proves the contrary – even though the girls who work for her are all from faraway places. Fatma challenged all the obstacles and was able to start her project without caring about anyone.

She was not concerned with the cultural order in society but with accessing the market and working and building an economic status, which she could not realize by working for others. This stage was characterized by the realization of financial independence despite local cultural order requirements; her activity could motivate other women to start similar economic activities.

Price paid for independence

After she started her project, Fatma met many obstacles that could be considered as the price to pay since she decided to launch it in a male dominated community. In this context, some of the men started harassing and pressuring her to urge her to leave the market, and this is by preventing her from being supplied with water and electricity, in addition to an attempt to put fire to her café damaging it and causing disturbances to her clients: «After a period of work I became the owner of this popular café, they tried to put fire to it, so that I leave the place, they robbed me, they removed the doors... I had electricity from one of the neighbors to have light in the café, they took it away, and one of the neighbors gave me water to water some plants near the café; they obliged him to stop giving me water.

Sometimes, they even throw stones at me and when a client comes to the café for a cup of tea or anything, they tell him why you go to have tea at this woman's café, what do you have with her they say it is immoral, this never happened for a woman to have a café here, I am the first woman It is immoral; the first woman here is I... ».

Fatma is the first woman to practice such an activity in the region, particularly in an area that seems to be the privilege of men (the market). The fact that she is from the region increases the extent of influence of her activity on local culture. She recognizes that her situation has improved compared to the past after some time working at Alnif: «I can only say that my situation now is better than before.... Now I thank my God. I can buy whatever I want, thank you God, God thank you God, I am exploited by no one, I can satisfy my needs according to my means, I am self-sufficient, I don't lead an exuberant life, thank you my God ».

Fatma achieved a part of what she was dreaming about and it is getting rid of begging and of being dominated and dependent on others as she became a boss employing other women; «They don't want me to stay here because, before, if anyone wanted me to do some work for him in his house, I went with them. When I opened this café they could no longer do that, so they fought me».

She is also responsible for her family, she is in charge of her mother and adopted

daughter, and she gives financial help to her sister. Today, Fatma has her own house, and this is something she would never have been able to realize if she continued to work in cafés, restaurants or as a house cleaner: « I look after 4 children, 2 girls and two boys. One of them is now studying in Meknes, it's my niece, and I look after them all, my sister's 4 children, my mother and my little daughter ». Fatma is responsible for her family in terms of financial expenses.

She also adopted an infant girl to gain social status that she cannot have being of a certain age and childless, according to local mentality. From what Fatma told us, we understand that she met obstacles related to social marginalization, because of her presence in the market as a café owner and this made it very difficult for people to accept her.

According to the community, she is a childless woman doing something unacceptable: « When I get out among people, I am ashamed of them; they say she is old and doesn't have children. Most people despise women, if a woman is not married, whoever she is, and they say she's a bad woman ». In spite of their despising look, she tries to get their love: « I am correct with people... even when I see that someone doesn't want to deal with me, I am correct with him, when there are many of them they are correct... lately, they started respecting me, and I am always correct with them, hello, hello, and I don't want to stay with them and gossip, good bye, good bye... ».

Behaving thus with the members of her community, she wants to eliminate or alleviate their negative idea about her, and from her talk, we understand that she realized some part of that. This reflects Fatima's capacities to deal with social refusal and marginalization.

In this presentation, we tried to highlight the main events that presented important turns in the life of Fatma. The experiences of divorce, homelessness and begging she underwent motivated her to start work and guided her towards building her personality in terms of social and professional capacities so that she decided to go back to her starting point and change her situation at whatever price. She challenged cultural order and society in the purpose of realizing social and economic independence.

Biography of Sonia (Tunisia)

Sonia is 45 years old, she was born in the seventies in a family of six and she lived in one of the North West Governorates of the Republic of Tunisia, specifically « the Governorate of Jendouba ». The Governorate of Jendouba lies along the Algerian frontier, and is a region known for its important agricultural production with a hard climate and geographical landscape. Now, Sonia works as a civil servant in the regional education administration in Jendouba after she started her career as a teacher in primary school; then she underwent family difficulties that affected in a remarkable way the rest of her personal life course. Concerning her family life, she is divorced for five years with two children who live with their father and she lives on her own. Sonia is also at the head of a Women's Association « Rural Women in Jendouba » which she founded after the revolution to access associational and public life at her local level.

Sonia considers that the operational strength of women does not lie in their education or knowledge background but in their courage, their boldness, their 'desire', their 'intelligence' and their 'life experience'. This is why Sonia tried to overcome the difficulties and obstacles that met her by concentrating on these aspects, which characterize her personality relating to social, professional, and education levels.

Social, professional and education course Education record: Ambitions, dreams and real life constraints

Sonia considers herself as being gifted in writing poetry and literary stories, she also likes philosophical readings since young age, as she got her baccalaureate in 1990 and decided to continue her studies at the university to get her Master's in Arabic civilization. Hence, she registered in the faculty of literature arts and human sciences in Manouba, department of Arabic. Her first year at the faculty was in 1991 and this offered her the opportunity to leave her local environment and have intellectual interactions and friendship relations with other students different from those she used to interact with in Jendouba.

«At that time, I was very much attached to nationalism, Arab union students' and students unions' activities because I think we, the Arab nation, all live in the same conditions and that our development and progress could be realized if we are united. I had a good relation with student from the Islamic movement (Ennahdha) and students from the Jabha (the communists) and we used to debate in the amphitheaters all the topics especially our problems as an Arab nation ».

However, the family's social and financial conditions at that time obliged her to disrupt her studies at the end of 1991, which obliged her to get back to her hometown and take a job as a teacher in a primary school to help support the family and allow the other brothers and sisters to continue their studies. Even though she dreamed of finishing her studies and become a university teacher, write poetry and publish her own collections of poems because her poetry was an expression of her ambitions and dreams relating to the Arab nation and to Arab women.

Professional record: Start of the change

While dropping out studies was the first crucial turn in Sonia's life, the beginning of her professional life coincided with the start of her private family life. Hence, Sonia started her job as teacher in a primary school in various rural areas of Jendouba such as « Ain ksir » and « Sidi meskin » and « Sakfoura » and other areas, and in the same year she got married with one relation of her father ; an educated man who worked in France with a respectable education level. She says:

« He promised to let me carry on my studies but when we were married, he did not keep his promises... Even though he has many qualities, he is intolerant and very egotistic, he ill-treated me from the first year of marriage and tried to demolish me by all means, he was opposed to me in terms of ideas, dreams even language. I can't remember anything nice I can mention ».

Sonia worked as a teacher in a primary school for over 17 years.

She disrupted her work as a teacher and had to go to hospital because of the deterioration of her physical and mental health due to her husband's bad conduct with her and the repeated physical and symbolic violence. « He used to throw away all my papers and work documents as well as papers where I write my poems or thoughts » she adds « sometimes when he finds me busy writing a poem, he wakes up my baby daughter so that she starts crying and prevents me from writing, he did all this on purpose and did not care ». Her mental health deteriorated and she was obliged to rest in bed for repeated long periods of time for about two years in the department of mental diseases in the regional hospital of Jendouba.

Sonia left her job of teacher in 2008 to continue her healthcare and restore her mental capacities until 2011; she resumed work in the position of administration agent in the regional division of the Ministry of Education in Jendouba. She could no longer teach, « As this job needs great mental capacities and I am now unable to stand stress with all the hardships I suffered and I lost my children who were everything to me ».

Social record:

Sonia's social record was not different from that of her mother according to what she said. As her mother met rejection from the part of her father's family because he married her without their approval, she says, « it is true, one should not ignore his family in many cases and it is normal that my father was influenced by them. But I lived in a family with a lot of problems between my mother and my father...The cause of all the problems between my father and mother originates from the fact that my dad was engaged with another young girl before he met my mother at one occasion and he decided to marry her without his family approval. Therefore, he had to live far away from his family because they did not like my mum, so I was affected by this atmosphere of violence ».

The conditions in which the young Sonia lived were not very different from those of own private life, with a continuation of the husband's violence and a continuation of oppression, domination and authority. Her husband did not help her and did not support her; she also started to notice a change in her children's conduct towards her because her husband was trying to persuade them that their mother was authoritarian and did not respect him and she wanted to spoil the family's reputation. However, Sonia's personal qualities characterized with strength, ambition, dreaming and determination sometimes made her challenge all the obstacles and she decided to divorce this handicapping man to achieve her ambitions. Sonia was obliged to leave her children to their father and give up all the family possessions to which she participated with her private money. Within this context, Sonia says: «I am known from childhood as obstinate.

When I want to do something, I do it. This is why I sometimes ask the opinions of my mother brothers and sisters but if something is important, I go ahead. For example, relating to divorce which I decided alone, I got my family's support. However, later they were persuaded that life was impossible with that man. They all started saying Sonia is tired and the children too are tired. I talked with my husband with logic about divorce, I was ready to give up the house that we had built together with a loan from the bank; give up my children ». Sonia found support from her colleagues and neighbors who supported her with her family problems.

Getting back to public life: From social work to political work

Sonia has a negative feeling about the change in the course of her family and private life. Besides her dissatisfaction with her reality, this negative feeling pushed her to look for other alternatives that could probably help her to gain back her capacity and her strong will, realize her ambitions, and overcome the social and mental difficulties she suffered from.

In this context, she says: « I love social work and helping others, in addition to my dream to live a happy and peaceful life in Jendouba. My dream is to see mentalities and prevailing local culture changed. Most people do not have a purpose or objective in their life. I want to become the « old » Sonia who disappeared in

me and is forgotten, Sonia, the courageous, the ambitious able to change things before she got married ».

Given the state of stagnation and immobilism on the one hand, and the big number of economic problems related to women in the town of Jendouba and most of its villages on the second hand, Sonia was able to participated in changing this situation through associational work, to start with, then political work, motivating thus a big number of women to join and participate:

Civic/associational work: A means to make for personal ambitions and dreams

The civic and associational areas are among the most important voluntary areas for women. Thus, Sonia participated remarkably and directly in the creation of six civic associations active in the area of citizenship, women's rights and development. In addition to national seminars and local meetings especially those which gather local authority representatives to debate and give their opinions and highlight all the social problems at the level of the region

Sonia also participated in the creation of association networks between civil society components in the Governorate of Jendouba and outside. In addition to this, she bets on her ability to influence women and motivate them to join associations to be active and improve their situations.

Sonia says: « I chose associational work after the revolution because I think it is the appropriate work and it gives all people the opportunity to participate in changing the mentalities and improving life conditions, I consider that everybody can contribute something; you don't need a high position or a leading post to participate in public life... I, personally, want to be independent and free in my work and way of thinking and activities, this is why I didn't want to work within a specific political party ».

Furthermore, Sonia's work in associations did not consist of her wish to help and participate in public life at the local level alone but she took this opportunity to try and make for the ambitions and dreams she had and also overcome social,

professional and family obstacles. In this concern, Sonia says: «What made me overcome all the obstacles I met in my professional and family life as well as my ambitions is mainly associational work. I consider my association as an important challenge to achieve my ambitions; this is why I spend my own money on the association. I lived a marriage experience for 17 terrible years. Associational work offered me the opportunity to train, learn and get informed about important matters such as social gender and violence against women and today I am able to understand my situation with all the background I acquired ».

Associational work also allowed Sonia to communicate with representatives from the local authorities in a serious and efficient way, as her views and suggestions were taken into consideration in most cases. She made her suggestions by letters or during face-to-face meetings or other meetings.

Political activity:

Sonia mentioned in the course of her talk that she has sympathies towards the ideas of the Nationalist Arab wave since she was a student at university. However, she did not have any vision or clear opinion relating to political affairs at that time but she was inclined to the dream of promoting the Arab Nation, and because of the political system and control imposed on students' movements, her participation was just at the university level. She used to participate in the students' debates and solidarity demonstrations especially those related to Palestine.

Following the revolution in Tunisia, Sonia started again to be involved in political life; this is after she created a women association to have an institutional framework that she could use for her field activities mainly. Moreover, in this way, she participated in the elections of October 2011 by being a candidate within the list of the « Maghreb Liberal Party » which included 8 members (4 men and 4 women); she was second on the list. This candidature required that she should organize an election campaign throughout the town and the rural areas of the Governorate of Jendouba during the month of October 2011 and she discovered that she was met by respect from many people and she was able to convince a big number of inhabitants, men and women.

She was convinced that they were very much confident in her; this is because of her education level all the more that she was an educator in contrast with the low education level or even illiteracy of most of the women there. "I contributed in all the topics and participated in all the debates with local authorities. They all know me... Sometimes I kept speaking for a long time, and when I did 2011 election campaign, all the people knew me and they would say this school teacher is honest (she's too clean) and we will support you inshallah...I consider this as a gain". However, despite all the efforts I made, I did not succeed in the elections due to all the difficulties I met, which are mainly the difficulty to convince citizens and the fact that women are not interested in political work. This is in addition to the lack of financial means of the party.

However, 'Sonia' was not discouraged with this failure and because she could not help her list win. She realized that participation alone was a good experience that helped reinforce her capacities and widen her social relation network in many rural areas such as "Bou Salem" and she was ready to use the personal results driven from this experience in a future opportunity.

Despite her failure in 2011 elections of the constitutional council, Sonia did not hesitate to repeat the experience a second time changing the objectives and challenges. She joined "the party of Nidaa Tounes" in 2013, (party with majority, in power now) with the idea of trying to persuade women to be involved in politics firstly then recruit people and sensitize them relating to the necessity of improving their situations and getting involved in political life at the national and the local levels. She firmly believed that improving the situations calls for political decisions. Hence, the first experience helped to gather maximum information and field experiences in the area of communication and organizing election campaigns on field, this allowed her to become a trainer. With her capacities to persuade and recruit 'Sonia' became one of the important figures in the Governorate of Jendouba and subject to interest and target of many important politicians. In fact, 'Sonia' received invitations from 45 different political parties and the offer of forming her own list during the 2014 elections.

The first concern of Sonia was not political work but she particularly wanted to encourage women to be involved and participate in order to improve their social situations instead of waiting passively for assistance and for change to occur.

Change at the local level

The first change to which Sonia contributed was a change in women's look to themselves. Thus, Sonia became a symbol of activism, engagement and sacrifice so that she was able to overcome the obstacles and handicaps meeting her in her family and professional life. And following a negative experience of marriage and divorce which led her into a bad situation, Sonia was able to make for whatever she couldn't get including her dreams through associational work first and then, political work. Her example arose strong will among many other women to participate in public life even by just attending round tables to debate political matters most of which were dealing with the profile of the candidates.

Our interviewee's candidature to 2011 elections and membership within the party "Nidaa Tounes" in 2014 were not an end in themselves, but this was a personal process that the interviewee adopted to increase women presence in public life at the local level of the Governorate of Jendouba. Quite aware about women's cultural and social specifics, especially relating to their relation to public life with all its challenges and obstacles, her activity within "Nidaa Tounes" consisted in motivating women to be involved in political life at the local level in the first place, and encourage them to integrate political parties and take positions within them in the second place. Furthermore, the strategic goal that Sonia wanted to achieve is to encourage women to unveil their political belongings. This is by publicly announcing her activities / her political belonging. As Sonia remarked that most politically, active women in Jendouba keep this secret and never speak about their political belonging.

At a second stage, Sonia withdrew from Nidaa Tounes as she considered that she had achieved her main goal, which motivated women to engage in political activity. Indeed, most women now express and defend their political views all the more that we notice an increase in the number of women participating in political parties, according to what Sonia says. In addition, in this concern, Sonia continued her activity within civil society with a determination to take any opportunity that could help motivate women participation in political life.

Biography of Amina (Tunisia)

Family domination and poor life conditions

Amina is 50, from the rural area of Jenh in Kairouan, divorced, works in a hotel in Hammamet and lives at Merazka, Nabeul.

Amina lived with her family including her father, mother, two sisters and two-step brothers. Her father took five wives before he married her mother who was orphan of both parents and, according to her, this explains why her mother could not leave him, as he was her single support, and she was the only wife who accepted to look after his sons.

Amina shows some feeling of gratitude to her father because he allowed them to go to school and supported them financially. Amina obtained the certificate of end of primary school and her father refused that she continue her studies because he didn't want her to leave the region and go to study in town: "I don't have daughters who go to 'Teboursouk'". Therefore, she studied in a French professional school, and then she worked in a children daycare center for five years from 1974 to 1979. Following this, her father got sick and she had to look after him while her mother worked in the fields and her two sisters were married.

After that, Amina took several jobs: "I worked in the fields of olives, raisins, sugar cane; I worked in weaving wool... I did many things and I suffered a lot in my life but the smart always get back on their feet when they fall".

In addition to financial difficulties, Amina suffered from her brother's domination as she says: "Anyone who came to ask my hand, my brother would say, no he is too rich for us... my brother was very hard with my mother and myself, he controlled everything, no one could have a word with him, my mum died from oppression". According to Amina, her circumstances of life dictated her course of life and guided her.

Amina was married to a man who was introduced to her by the husband of a cousin and that her brother accepted. Her husband worked as responsible for a team of cooks in a restaurant and he demanded that she does not work which she accepted. However, not long after that, he was dismissed and he gave her a choice between

selling the house or staying with him, she opted for selling the house. Meanwhile, her mother died and this increased her burden as she says: "I have no one to defend me, I am responsible for myself".

The start of a new phase Independence and responsibility

Following her father's and mother's death and her separation from her husband and, without any desire to get married again, Amina's life underwent a big move. She travelled from one governorate to another, she took a training course in hairdressing in the Governorate of Monastir and participated in two national contests, she told us with pride that she was among the best in both contests.

Then, she came back and settled in Nabeul. She took a job as a seamstress in a hotel in Hammamet and as a head of cooks' team; now, she is reimbursing a loan that she took with an institution for funding small projects 'Enda Fund', which allowed her to build the house where she lives now

Political involvement

Amina expressed a negative view relating to the revolution in Tunisia. She said it was "a big mistake" basing her opinion on people's demonstrations and protest as well as the wave of strikes: "We are heading towards the worst, People's way of thinking must change, it is their right to claim and demand but you need to work before. One should not do like teachers and schoolmasters, they stop work to express their claims and demands, what does the country need to keep on? It needs work...."

Amina is involved in political life and elections and she considers that political involvement is an obligation "If I'm interested in Politics? of course I am interested, we live in this country and so everything in this country is interesting to me". She refers the little or lack of interest of some women in politics to the "lack of awareness" as she is surrounded by women who migrate from rural areas to big cities and who are illiterate and suffer hard social and economic conditions.

Collaboration with associations and endorsement of the region issues

Amina lives with her nephew and niece who are at the university in Nabeul and she supports them. She also helps all the needy in her area; and since her financial means are not enough, she co-ordinates between these needy and associations and volunteers.

Amina deals with the association “Women Voice” in Nabeul who organize their meetings in her house because they do not yet have premises.

Amina accompanies volunteering doctors who visit very poor families to examine children. In addition to this, she assists and helps all the inhabitants in her area relating to legal procedures related to construction or property registration and other such as claiming a right or complaining.

Amina sends letters to any specialized organism relating to equipping the region with the necessary facilities, she meets responsible people from the authorities and she goes to the Ministry to check there are budgets reserved to the realization of projects with deadlines.

Furthermore, she never misses an election opportunity motivating and accompanying her female neighbors to vote. Amina's biography confirms the link existing between the social and the political as when people open themselves to society and to its issues, and then citizenship is achieved.

Biography of Hana (Occupied palestine territories)

Hana was born at Nablus and currently lives in the village of Kafr Al Dik, District of Salfit, and she lived before in Jordan and in the Emirates, she is second among her brothers and sisters and she has one single sister who is four years younger and eleven brothers among whom three died in the battle. Since childhood, Hana suffered from ill-treatment, restrictions and deprivations. Even when she moved to live with her husband's family, they pressured her enormously. However, she awakened and with determination, challenging everybody as well as her husband's ill-treatment until she took a job and gained economic independence; then she started an association in her country and made it a kind of nursery for women where they could learn their rights and how to claim them.

A miserable childhood with burdens and responsibilities

Hana has never felt a day that she had had a childhood like other children as since she was a little girl, she was in charge of her brothers and sisters who were younger than she was; she was also responsible for housework and household responsibilities alone without help from any of her brothers and sisters. "I didn't live my childhood, I can't remember a day when I was considered as little girl. I was responsible for my brothers and sisters who are younger than me and for the housework, cleaning and making bread; I did all this before going to school, which means very early in the morning before sunrise, I can't remember a day that I spent playing with my girlfriends". Her relationship with her mother and eldest brother was not very good as they were often ruthless with her.

They used to beat, curse and deprive her: "My mother, God bless her soul, treated me as if I was a step daughter. She segregated against me as if I was the mother with all the household responsibilities on my shoulders. As to my sister, she was too young and had nothing to do with that. My relation with my brother was like the relation between the Israelis and the prisoner, everything is forbidden, freedom oppressed, pressure, even when I think of going to visit a friend, he says no or else with someone to accompany me".

Hana had a good relationship with her father and the other brothers and this is what, according to her somewhat relieved the atmosphere between her mother and eldest brother and herself: "My relation with my father and younger brothers was better than my relation with my mum and eldest brother".

Deprivation of school and forced marriage

Hana's hardships increased when she was obliged to interrupt her studies after general secondary school, she did not even have the right to think of that, and despite her strong desire, deeply buried inside her dream to have an education, which, according to her, is the gate to public and political participation. Instead, she was forced to marry without any celebration, without the nice white dress like all young girls.

I was not even allowed to think about carrying on my studies.

When I told my mother that I wanted to finish my studies, I met total refusal. I asked them to let me study nursery and there was like a war with my mother and eldest brother. I said I wanted to study aesthetics and the answer was forcing me to get married without my approval, it was like a transaction".

Refusal and revolt, nothing to lose but herself

Despite the hardships that Hana suffered during childhood, her deprivation from school and her forced marriage in horrible conditions, which she doesn't want to remember. All this boosted her to change her course of life, and this started with refusal and revolt against all the oppressions she suffered from her mother and eldest brother and from her husband's family. She had a strong personal belief that the only loss if she continued to submit to this family and neighborhood pressure was her own self. Hence, she started by taking training sessions in various areas such as management and leadership, environment leadership, communication and self-confidence, psychological help, primary rescue, and other areas, and this really sculpted her personality so that she took a job in a private institution in order to achieve her economic independence; she also did other freelance jobs like aesthetics and commerce.

This put an end to all the forms of deprivation she faced in different phases of her life. In this way, she gained economic autonomy and independence in making decisions related to the local, family, and private levels.

“I refused all the oppression and all the sufferings that I lived especially with my husband’s family, and my deprivation of school. However, with determination, I was able to put an end to all that. Then, I took my destiny in hand and I worked so that I achieved economic independence and self-reliance. I think women have a nobler role than just doing the housework and a lot more important role than being under the control of usage and traditions. They are more important than being observed by the neighbors and being spied in all their movements and their relations because women proved that they have more capacities to manage and are more intelligent”.

Beginning of civic participation

In spite of her mother’s past ill-treatment, though she was often trying to find justifications for her mother’s conduct. Hana says that her mother was herself victim of segregation from her own stepmother; in addition to the local context and a disqualifying environment that denies girls their rights and equal opportunities. The difference between her mother and herself, according to her, is that she refused violence against her children. “My mother is herself the victim of a father and a divorced mother, the difference between my mother and myself is that she suffered violence and used violence whereas me, I suffered violence but I am against violence”. Hence, her starting point was questioning the place of women in her local society and yearning to operate changes in their everyday life conditions.

So, during her work and, given the nature of her work, since she worked with a women credit institution, she decided to create a Women Association in her town that could be a kind of nursery for women and for their sufferings and problems and could inform them about their rights. Hana says that what motivated her to create a women association is the state of women marginalization in rural environments and the quantity of free unused time and injustice against women.

“I hope the situation will be improved at all levels, economic, social and political and that women gain a better place in society and could have more access to professional and academic fields”.

Family and community support

In spite of the difficulties and obstacles on her way in the beginning of her career and participation in public life, Hana insisted on the fact that the environment at the family, social and institutional levels recognized the important role and the transformations she brought onto women's situations as well as their families' lives. In addition, this, according to Hana, thanks to her resistance, determination and her achievements boasted in the village. “The family gave me total support, the husband, the children and there is no doubt I meet some pressure from my husband's family but this gives me more force to go ahead. I also met the objection of my brothers in the beginning. However, I was determined to continue and persevere to consolidate myself.

My determination and my resistance, my hard work, my success and my achievements pushed them back all. Now, wherever you go in Kafr Al Dik they talk about the first personality among women, even at the municipality wherever there is meeting or a workshop and there are no guest speakers, I am the first one to be invited”.

Field obstacles

One of the main obstacles that met Hana in the beginning of her work is the non-commitment of women in the local community in attending sensitization meetings. This is due to the economic situation and to women responsibilities at home; or also their lack of awareness about the impact of these meetings on them and on their interactions with others in the family. This could also be due to the restrictions imposed on them by males in the family.

In order to overcome this obstacle, Hana used the strategy of dialogue and persuasion, based on the benefit that could be derived and the role she could play to reinforce their self-confidence and self-respect, and thus reinforce their relation and their interaction with their husbands and children. "In the beginning, I address the women and I give them an idea about the project, the workshop or any activity on the agenda that day.

I start by telling them about the impact of the activity on their way of thinking, about the change, about the benefit to be derived from the planned workshop. We do face some problems due to family pressure or obligations but I try as I can to explain to them that this is more important; this also presents a benefit to your children and your family.

We meet many problems with the husbands, because sometimes women are not motivated and the husbands are not motivated either that their wives leave the house for any reason related to women themselves or to their obligations at home. Therefore, we try to set priorities relating to their household obligations, and when you finish all you have to do at home and the children are at school, take the opportunity. Any information you can get is beneficial to you; listening to other people's experience is also beneficial".

Among the other difficulties meeting Hana in her job as president of an association, we find the lack of financial means, which present a big rock blocking the implementation of economic projects that are based on women's needs and capacities, the other obstacle is the lack of support in addition to the lack of expertise and capacities able to back her leading career. "The center faces financial problems; no doubt, the financial situation is very bad".

In this context as well, Hana uses the strategy of dialogue and persuasion to convince the executive committee about the importance of the role they have to play to change the conditions of marginalized categories in the local society. She also uses the strategy of partnership with local and international institutions to exchange expertise and information in order to improve the framework as well as improve local basic institution work methods in order to support the rights of the marginalized categories.

Hana at present

Now, Hana is an important woman in her local surrounding. In addition to being president of a women association, she is an important member in Salfit city council, which also aims at improving basic institutions and local councils represented in the mixed council, through building its human resources capacities and improving its financial means in order to achieve self-sufficiency; Hana is also a member of the managing committee of the refugee administration office.

Finally, Hana is looking forward to being the first lady in the district of Salfit and taking an important position in the region and become a decision-maker in issues that relate to local affairs.

From this presentation of Hana's biography, we highlighted the main milestones in her life and which represented as a whole a starting point towards the acquisition of a leading role within her local environment. Hana underwent hard experiences from her childhood that she did not live like all children playing with friends because she had the household responsibilities and obligations, besides her bad relation with her mother, who also suffered before her in her childhood. Furthermore, her relation with her eldest brother was characterized by ruthlessness, domination and deprivation.

This did not improve all along her life within the family. In addition to her deprivation of university or professional studies. She ended up involved in a miserable marriage imposed on her in very bad conditions without even asking her opinion and without celebrating the marriage. She did not even have the opportunity to wear the dream white dress. All these events formed a turn for Hana's revolt against herself and against her hard life conditions. This boosted her to break all the chains that tied her to be it from her mother, family, or from her husband's family. She gathered all her strengths and started work to achieve economic independence, which presented an opening towards the creation of a women association aiming at transforming women's life conditions at her local level.

Biography of Nawal (Occupied palestine territories)

Nawal is from the refugee camp of Asker Kadha, Nablus, she is 59. After getting married, she moved to live at Beit Sourik Kadha, Jerusalem. She has nine children (6 sons and 3 daughters). Before moving to Sourik, at the beginning of her married life, she moved to Jordan because her husband was exiled in Jordan and stayed there until 1994. with the signature of Oslo convention between Ettahrir Organization and the state of the Israeli occupant which allowed many of the exiled to come back to Palestine, Nawal and her family came back home. Following her come back to Sourik, birth place of her husband, Nawal was able to operate a remarkable change in the village in terms of providing a number of services as well as changes at the level of the family.

Childhood and period before marriage

Nawal's family is among the refugees who left their country in 1947, she was born and lived in the refugee camp in the district of Nablus for 16 years. She comes from a nationally activist family. Her father was wanted by the British authority at the time of British recruitment because of his activities for the nation. One of her brothers was also wanted by Israeli occupation during the second Intifada in Palestine and he was injured many times. Like all other girls, she did not have any choice or freedom to move in a conservative environment. She dropped out school due to family pressure and married at an early age as she was just below 16. She married her cousin in the traditional way. According to what Nawal says, all the girls dreamed about the nice white dress and the bridegroom and so she accepted the husband as a kind of pride in front of her friends.

Transformation after marriage

Nawal married one of her family members while he was exiled and joined him in Jordan. Her husband's family has an activist record. Her father and mother in law were active in the Palestinian fight for freedom. Political participation was very important among the family of the husband's mother, as her mother in law had a leading role in the fight in the time of Abdelkader

Alhousaini, and she used to transport arms to the fighters disguised in a fighter uniform. The husband's family was exiled in Jordan and Nawal joined them there after marriage.

In the beginning of her married life, Nawal did not care about public life and was content with her private life as she granted the priority to her children's education. She was concerned with her daughters' and sons' studies until they accomplished university. Nawal believes in the necessity for girls to accomplish their studies especially that she was deprived of this and which affected her life in terms of the kind of job and self-accomplishment. For this reason, she encouraged her daughters in law as well to finish their university studies.

In Jordan, Nawal attended meetings and training sessions in sewing, knitting, using machines. Nawal was encouraged to participate in public life with her husband's family activist record.

Starting civic participation: achievements and obstacles

During her stay in Jordan, Nawal obtained a military grade of sergeant with the Fatah Movement. Moreover, she started to participate in meetings and seminars with Palestinian and Arab exiled women and women from the Arab world that are active in the political area and human rights. After the signature of the Oslo convention, Nawal was able to come back home to her husband's family town – Beit Sourik. Nawal suffered from social and political restrictions imposed on Beit Sourik. The village is considered as conservative with strong segregation between male and female, and specific roles for women.

After coming back to Sourik, Nawal continued to work for women associations in addition to the improvement of her self-empowerment by attending the meetings organized by human rights women associations, all the more that her position in Fatah Organization participated in her integration in the political operation because of the responsibilities assigned to her.

When she came back to the village of Sourik, Nawal noticed there was a lack of women associations in addition to the fact that women were inexistent in the local council and anything that affects the village future. This was her start as she created the women association in 2006 that she runs now. She got support only from her husband and sons.

Following the creation of the association, Nawal started to make changes in the village as a whole. She established collaborations and partnerships with many local women associations in order to organize training for women related to their rights and violence against women.

On the other hand, she had the agreement of the Ministry of education that the village women could resume studies in the secondary school after long breaks and she was the first one to get back to school; 13 women got their certificate of end of secondary school; this was an important gain to the village women. She also organized session to eradicate illiteracy.

With the help of Nawal, the association organized sessions for embroidery, project management and sewing to which attended 70 women from Beit Sourik. Nawal tried to get loans to open workshops of embroidery and sewing for women, this project created jobs for 9 of the village women.

Despite the success of the idea of starting sewing and embroidery projects and making contracts with national institutions that would buy the products from the association, the issue of marketing their products remained an important obstacle facing women at Beit Sourik and surrounding villages. In addition to this, there was hard competition from the important local production. Furthermore, the market was closed and export complicated as well as making contracts with foreign institutions. These obstacles prevented the projects from expanding so that only few women could keep their jobs.

As to the village as a whole, Nawal could get the agreement of the Minister of transport to widen the roads and improve infrastructure in the village and this had a positive impact on the village population.

Nawal presented her candidature to the local council elections in spite of objections from the family and the local community in the village but she was decided to continue this experience with the support of her husband and sons.

Nawal was successful thanks to support from Fatah Organization and the quota system in the elections. There was a lot of objection to Nawal's presence among the local council members and they objected to the fact that she attends the meetings which were considered to be reserved for men only; this made her more determined about continuing to break this wall and stop women elimination from civic and political life.

Nawal was selected by the district co-ordination bureau in the office of the Palestinian Authority President for the position of First Coordinator to network 13 districts in Kadha Al Kods among which Beit Sourik. By means of this post, she could network women associations in the districts and the creation of a network for communication and information exchange between women.

Nawal met many obstacles at the level of the large family and local community when she tried to access civic and political life. At family level, her husband's family tried to prevent her from presenting her candidature to the election because this was reserved to men and she was going to compete with men from the family. This is why there was a break up with her husband's large family; they pressured her husband asking him to try to influence her to withdraw her candidature.

Her husband's support and the fact that Nawal's role gained her respect from society and from her sons had a great positive impact on her and motivated her to continue her record. At the level of local society, the local council members fought Nawal accusing her family of not paying their water and electricity invoices even though the invoices were in the name of her husband but this is because they were trying to prevent her access to political life.

From social objection to acceptance

The attitude of society members and most particularly men at Beit Sourik changed from objection to the presence of Nawal as a member in the local council and other local commissions to acceptance because of the important role she played to change the village for better. The project for women education and for improving the infrastructure and particularly roads in the village, contributed very positively to change the attitude of Nawal's environment towards her and to valuing her role and even referring to her in case of problem. For example, the fact that Nawal took training sessions in rescue and nursing and improved her capacities in this area led to considering Nawal a central reference in case of health problem.

Moreover, because of her positive and successful interventions in many cases, people from the village men and women showed more respect towards her.

The high opinions about Nawal in the village reinforced her role in the local council as she could join many of the council commissions not only women commission. This motivated other women towards more participation and many of them accessed the different council commissions and are thinking of presenting their candidature to local councils.

Another noticeable change in the village culture is the issue of girls' travelling in the village and abroad. Nawal worked for the establishment of twinning relations with associations in Britain. However, families are still opposed to girls' travelling abroad.

In order to eradicate this rock of refusal, Nawal adopted the solution of motivating girls from her family to travel with her in order to create an atmosphere of confidence among the village inhabitants so that they can send their girls with her the next time. Nawal succeeded to change thing and was able to send some girls on training in Britain.

Nawal's view of empowerment and transformation

Nawal considers that empowerment is a personal business by excellence. Women need several qualities like strong will, setting priorities with objectives to achieve. Success in public participation starts, according to Nawal, with participation in associations and organizations.

It is a gate towards communication and interaction with decision-makers, which is the way to make change happen. On the other hand, associations should follow up the candidates, work with them, and explain their roles and their rights in local councils.

Objectivity when you belong in a political party is crucial for people to be appreciated by society and particularly for women.

Avoiding favoring people based on their political belonging as well as clientelism are the keys to gain local society approval.

Appendix 3

Geographical, demographic and economic characteristics of the areas selected in the four countries

1 - Tunisia

The Republic of Tunisia is situated in North Africa. It is a part of the Arab Maghreb, the Mediterranean countries and the Arab World. Its national territory is divided into 24 governorates (provinces) spread over 6 different regions. The surface area of Tunisia is 163,000 km², with a population of approximately 10.982 million inhabitants, according to the last population count of 2014, with an annual demographic increase of 1.03%.

Table 1. Background data about Tunisia

Total population	Surface area	Population distribution (by area)		Population distribution (by sex)		Un-employment rate	Poverty rate
		Urban area	Rural area	Female	Male		
10982000	163000 km ²	67.8%	29.2%	50.2%	49.8%	15.2%	15.5%

Source: National Institute for Statistics, 2014

The population living in urban area stands at 67.8%, against 32.2% in non-communal areas. The people below 15 years of age represent 23% of the population, and those between 15 and 29, 28%.⁽³⁴⁾

Based on the methodological choices in the Tunisian study, which included urban areas and marginalized areas with low economic indicators and political participation, the following three governorates were selected: Nabeul, Jendouba, Gabes.

34. National Statistics Institute.

Table 2. Demographic and social features of the sites selected in Tunisia

Governorates/ Provinces	Governorate population rate in total population	Population distribution (by area)	
		Urban area	Rural area
Nabeul	7.2%	68%	32%
Jendouba	3.7%	31%	69%
Gabes	3.4%	70%	30%

Source: The National Statistics Institute, 2014

The governorate of Nabeul stands third in rank in terms of population size in the Republic, with 7.2%, after Tunis and Sfax. This region is characterized by an important tourism activity, as it has a hosting capacity equal to one fourth of the national capacity, which puts it first in terms revenues from tourism. Tourism helps to absorb a big number of the unemployed. In addition, the small trade, handicraft and industrial sectors are well-developed and employ an important female workforce, making Nabeul an attractive destination for many migrants from other parts of the country.

The governorate of Jendouba, established in 1996, is in the North West part of Tunisia, which includes four governorates. It is situated south of the Medjerda River, which has its source in Souk Ahras, Algeria. The governorate is 14th in terms of population size, according to the 2014 census. Most of its population (two thirds) lives in rural areas, against one third in communal areas. Given its geographical situation, it has high annual rainfall which boosts agricultural production, its main economic strength. Note that Jendouba is among the governorates with a decreasing demographic rate due to higher exodus to the capital and other big cities on the coast. Besides, it has a high rate of poverty and illiteracy.

The governorate of Gabes is in the South-East region of Tunisia. It is characterized by its large gulf and extended coastline. In terms of administration, Gabes includes

a number of delegations and rural and semi-rural villages. It ranks 16th in terms of population size (2014 census). The population rural in areas represents one third of the governorate's population, against two thirds in urban areas. The governorate attracts big waves of migration from the inner regions in the governorates of the South because of its high economic indicators.

In terms of agriculture, Gabes is known for its large oases of palm trees as well as extensive, irrigated farming land thanks to abundant water sources. In addition, it has an industrial zone for phosphate processing and export, close to the city of Gabes and the commercial harbor. It also has an important road network connecting it to the tourist area in Jerba. The governorate has specialized industrial units in the oil and chemical sectors which employ a large workforce.

2 - Morocco

The Moroccan Kingdom is part of North Africa. It is characterized by a great civilization history and important natural and economic resources. Three areas were selected for the purposes of the national study: Rabat, Meknes and Alnif.

The region of Rabat is one the Moroccan urban areas with a large population, compared to the other regions in the kingdom, as it is the political and administrative center. This makes it one of the least marginalized and poor areas, with 7.2%, compared to the national average of 8.9%, according to data from the High Planning Commission, Poverty Map for 2007.

On the demographic level, the population of the Rabat region is about 1.4 million inhabitants, with a female proportion of 51.6%, against 48.4% of males. This population includes around 300,000 families, with 4-5 members each, knowing that the national average is 5 per family. The households headed by single mothers represent 18% of the total in Rabat.

The Illiteracy rate among Moroccan females in the region of Rabat reached about 28.6% in 2004, against 12.3% for males. The rate registered in the region Sela, just next to Rabat, is higher, but still much lower than the national average. The administration, industry and service sectors are the main employers in Rabat, particularly for women, while the commerce sector employs most of the active males.

Table 3. Background data about Morocco

Total population	Population distribution (by area) RGPH 2014 ⁽³⁵⁾		Population distribution (by sex) PHRG 2004 ⁽³⁶⁾		Unemployment rate (2013) ⁽³⁷⁾	Poverty rate (2007) ⁽³⁸⁾
	Rural area	Urban area	Female	Male		
33 848 242	39.64%	52.60 %	50.7%	49.3%	9.2%	8.9%

Source: High Planning Commission, Poverty Map of 2007, Rabat, Morocco 2010.

35. General population and housing census, Morocco, 2014.

36. General population and housing census, Morocco, 2004.

37. Directorate of Statistics, Rabat, Morocco, 2013.

38. High Planning Commission, Poverty Map of 2007, Rabat, Morocco 2010.

The region of Meknes is one of the Eastern regions relative to Rabat, with a population of about 460,000 inhabitants (in 2004). Women represent 51.3% of the total population in the city. There are about 100,000 households in Meknes, 16.5% of which are headed by single women.

The illiteracy rate among inhabitants aged over 10 in the region is 28%, most of them women. The educated population in Meknes shows a high proportion of women with some primary school education, reaching 19.2% of educated people, while in secondary and tertiary education they only make 11% and 4%, respectively. The proportion of women who completed their basic education is 11%.

At the economic level, the Moroccan report showed that the proportion of active women in Meknes was estimated at 11.7%, with 11.2% salaried workers, out the active population, 6.7% civil servants, and 5% self-employed. Craftswomen and small traders make up 11.6% and 8.2%, respectively, compared to women working in administration. The industrial sector ranks second, employing around 6.2%, and the services sector, 5.6%.

Table 4. Demographic and social features of the sites selected in Morocco

Governorate / Province	Population rate out of total 2014 ⁽³⁹⁾	Population distribution (by area) 2014		Illiteracy rate 2004 ⁽⁴⁰⁾	Poverty rate 2007 ⁽⁴¹⁾
		Rural area	Urban area		
Rabat	4.61%	4.26%	95.74%	20.7%	0.9%
Meknes	1.54%	0%	100%	26.7%	6.9%
Alnif	0.07%	79.9%	20.81%	43.3%	23.3%

Source: High Planning Commission, Poverty Map of 2007, Rabat, Morocco 2010

39. Recensement général de la population et de l’habitat, Maroc, 2014.

40. Recensement général de la population et de l’habitat, Maroc, 2004.

41. Direction de la Statistique, Maroc, 2007.

The region of Alnif lies in the South-East of the Kingdom. It has a population of 3,072 inhabitants, with 49.6% of the women living in urban areas, and about 53%, in villages. The proportion of women with a primary education represent is about 26%. It is lower for women with a secondary education (8%), according to the 2004 statistics.

As to the economic level, Alnif has several natural resources, such as minerals, marble as well as lead, copper and iron mines. However, though important, the revenues from these resources, have not served the local needs, resulting in deteriorating infrastructure. Urban women's economic activities do not exceed 3.4%, against 24% for men. The population of active women falls into two categories, both characterized by stark vulnerability. Some are self-employed, representing 5% and 7% in urban and rural areas, respectively, out of the whole active population. Alnif mainly provides an abundant supply of female farm workers.

3 - Yemen

Yemen lies in the South-West of Asia, South of the Arabic Peninsula. Local governance there is a form of government based on the principles of administrative and financial decentralization and broad participation opportunities for people in policy, planning and programs design as well as decision-making.

The Yemeni national study indicated that the political crisis the Yemeni State is going through has had negative economic and social effects on the whole population. This has lowered the income and basic services by 30% in urban area and 60% in rural areas. Fuel prices rose by 150%.

Table 5. Background data about Yemen

Total population (Million)	Population distribution (by area)		Population distribution (by sex)		Unemployment rate ⁽⁴²⁾	Poverty rate
	Rural area	Urban area	Female	Male		
25.235	71.15%	28.85%	49.102%	50.897%	17.8%	34.78%

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Annual statistics book, Yemen, 2014.

The following are the main features of the provinces selected for the study, namely Sanaa, Hadida and Hadramaut:

The Province of Sanaa is considered the historical and political capital of the Republic of Yemen. It is situated in the region of Kyaan, between the Western mountain chain and the Eastern hills, in the middle of the Western part of Yemen. It is situated 2,150 meters above sea level and it is surrounded by two mountains. The surface area of the capital is 390 km², subdivided into ten districts according to the administrative partition of 2004. The population of Sanaa represents 9% of the total number of inhabitants in Yemen.

42. poverty and unemployment are expected to rise as the crisis continues.

This region suffers from a high exodus and internal migration rate, with negative social and economic effects. In addition, the study highlighted a high poverty rate and a high level of mendacity, deprivation and marginalization.

As for the Province of Hadida, which lies in the Western part of the Yemen, along the Western coast overlooking the Red Sea, it has 157,552 inhabitants, representing 11% of the total population, approximately.

Farming is the main activity in the province of Hadida. It ranks first in the production of vegetables, fruit and animal feed, in addition fishing, since the province has a long coast, rich in fish and other sea life in terms of quantity and quality. The region also includes a number of industrial facilities.

The Province of Hadramaut lies in the Eastern part of of Yemen, on the coast of the Arab Sea. The province’s inhabitants represent 5.2% of the total population (1,028,556). Farming (dates and cereals), fishing and cattle raising are among the most important activities, with a 5.8% contribution to the total Yemeni production.

Table 6. Demographic and social characteristics of the regions selected in Yemen

Governorate/ Province	Population rate	Population distribution		Poverty rate
		Rural area	Urban area	
Sanaa	9%	20.3%	79.7%	14.8%
Hadhrumet	5.2%	53.8%	46.2%	35.5%
Hadida	10.9%	64.7%	35.2%	31.7%

Source: Central Bureau for statistics, Annual statistics book, Yemen, 2014.

4 - The occupied Palestinian territory

The total area of historical Palestine is 27.009 km²; however, the surface area proposed since 1967 (the West Bank and Ghaza) does not 6,209 km² and represents 22.95% of the historical area. Concerning the demographic characteristics, the rates remained stable in the last four years (2010-2014), with 50.8% males and 49.2% females, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The main feature of Palestinian society is that it is young, with 39.7% of the total population below 15 years of age in mid-2014, distributed as follows: 39.9% males and 39.5% females. Young people in the 15-29 range represent 30%⁽³⁹⁾. Concerning unemployment, the average for women at age 13 and older was 47% in 2014, against 16.4% for men in the same age range.

The three regions chosen in the national study were Salfit, Jerusalem and Central Ghaza.

Table 7. Background data about Palestine

Total population	Surface area	Population distribution (by area) ⁽⁴³⁾		Population distribution (by sex) ⁽⁴⁴⁾		Unemployment rate ⁽⁴⁵⁾	Illiteracy rate ⁽⁴⁶⁾	Poverty rate ⁽⁴⁷⁾
		Urban area	Rural area	Female	Male			
4.42 Million	6209 km ²	73.6%	17.4%	50.8%	49.2%	23.4%	3.6%	25.8%

Source: Palestinian statistics central Office, Palestinian book of statistics, December 2013

The Province of Salfit lies in West Bank, between Nablus, Ramallah and Kalkilyah. It is the headquarters of the province and comprises 24 villages. It is an agricultural fertile area thanks to the number of water sources in it.

43. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book1634.pdf>

44. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2015.pdf>

45. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__ar/881/default.aspx#LabourA

46. www.wafainfo.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=9145

47. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__ar/881/default.aspx#LabourA

The population of Salfit is 12 thousand people. In 1948, a number of Palestinian refugees migrated there after being chased from their land and eventually became part of the local community. Their number is estimated at 600 people.

The province relies mainly on agriculture. The Israeli occupation actions, taking the land away from people and controlling water resources to expand settlements, negatively affected the social and economic situation at Salfit. As for economic activity, men and women turned to work in the private sector. The region is characterized by poor infrastructure and a limited number of factories and business enterprises due to the policy of closing the checkpoints by the occupation forces. Settlement activity is quite strong in Salfit.

As to the Province of Jerusalem, it is situated in the West Bank, with an area of 345 km², representing 7.5% of the total area of Palestine. It includes 44 communities. Jerusalem is considered the historical capital of Palestine, with a population of about 404,165 in 2013, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. This number represents 1.9% of the total population of Palestine and 14.9% of the population in the West Bank.

The economic situation is characterized by a decline and deterioration due to the siege imposed by the occupation on the of Jerusalem, in particular, and the neighboring villages, for the purpose of expropriating it. This has led to a rise in unemployment and poverty rates. Local commerce consists in the retail sale of food products, fruits and vegetables, without any wholesale, industrial or service activity. There are some small workshops for carpentry and ironwork; however, they are small and do not meet the families' needs, nor do they offer employment. In 2011, the unemployment rate reached 13.2% in province.

As for the Ghaza District, it is situated outside the siege area and is mainly agricultural. However, it has not escaped from the control of the occupation forces, which keep infiltrating the land and bulldozing farms. The population in Ghaza is 220,000 inhabitants in an area of about 59,000 hectares, with thousands of families living mainly on income from farming.

